





# GAMMA

CHARLES BEAUMONT

RICHARD MATHESON

RAY BRADBURY

STEVE ALLEN

VOL. 2, No. 5, SEPTEMBER, 1968

ACRL

50c

A COMPLETE NEW NOVEL  
BY  
RON GOULART



# GAMMA 5

## *New Frontiers in Fiction*

### COMPLETE NOVEL

Nesbit ..... 3.....Ron Goulart

### SHORT STORIES

Policy Conference ..... 67.....Sylvia Dees and Ted White  
Auto Suggestion ..... 70.....Charles Beaumont  
Welcome to Procyon IV ..... 82.....Chester H. Carlfi  
Interest ..... 84.....Richard Matheson  
Lullabye and Goodnight ..... 97.....George Clayton Johnson  
A Careful Man Dies ..... 102.....Ray Bradbury  
The Late Mr. Adams ..... 115.....Steve Allen  
Wet Season ..... 118.....Dennis Etchison

INTERIOR ART ..... William F. Nolan  
Luon Weatheringham  
Burt Shonberg  
Bernard Zuber

COVER by John Heoley, illustrating NESBIT

Editor-Publishers:  
CHARLES E. FRITCH  
JACK MATCHA

GAMMA is published bimonthly by Star Press, Inc., with editorial offices at 10523 Burbank Blvd., North Hollywood, Calif. Printed in U.S.A. Copyright © 1965 by Star Press, Inc. All rights reserved. Submissions must be accompanied by stamped, self-addressed envelope; the publisher assumes no responsibility for the return of unsolicited manuscripts or artwork.

## ACROSS THE EDITOR'S DESK

each day comes a variety of material. Among the articles in a recent day's mail we found:

- six unsolicited manuscripts, one without return postage and envelope, another typed apparently without a ribbon, a third containing cute children's sayings;

- a postal card announcing Forry Ackerman's annual combination birthday-Thanksgiving-Christmas-Hallowe'en-Bastille Day get-together of a few thousand friends;

- a letter from England asking could we mention the forthcoming 23rd World Science-Fiction Convention at the Mount Royal Hotel in London August 27-30, membership fee \$2.00, plus \$1.00 if you attend, U. S. Agent Bill Evans at Box 86, Mt. Ranier, Maryland;

- a pamphlet from an obscure religious sect obsessed with the idea that Christ was a Communist;

- letters from fans who like us, do not like us, do not understand us, or who do understand us and are concerned about it;

- a note from our cover artist, John Healey, which says: "I'm glad your readers liked my space-opera cover for GAMMA 4. I hope they'll be equally enthusiastic about this one. In answer to your request for biographical information, let me say that I was born in Hollywood in 1923, the son of George Cooper (Healey), a silent motion picture comedian, so a lot of my impressionable youth was spent around movie studios. After three years of World War II Navy service, I tucked my G.I. Bill under my arm and attended art school for four years. Now, after several years in comic book art and pocketbook cover illustration, I find myself for the most part hack working on home ground in Hollywood, doing TV series such as SPACE ANGEL and JONNY QUEST. I am married, have four sons, and make the San Fernando Valley my home."

And so to bed.

P.S. Back-issue copies of GAMMA are still available. Order direct from publisher, enclosing sixty cents for each issue wanted.

Ron Goulart sent us a threatening letter saying that we'd better correct a previous introduction which claimed he'd graduated from UCLA - or was it USC? Actually, he'd graduated, he claimed, from USC - or was it UCLA? We can't check it because we sent back his letter with a rejection slip.

In five issues of GAMMA Ron has had three stories - *Society for the Prevention* in #3, *The Hand of Dr. Invidious* in #4, and now *Nesbit*, which follows.

We've tried to reject Goulart stories, we really have. We've even written him letters saying, "Ron, for Pete's sakes, give somebody else a chance." But still he sends us stories we can't resist.

And, if that isn't enough, now look what we've got on our hands.

NESBIT.

A complete new novel, his first, taking up over half of GAMMA 5!

*Boy!*

## NESBIT

*Ron Goulart*

### *Chapter One*

Tim McCarey cut across the sand to the sleeping agent. He squatted down next to the tanned little man and, turning away from the wind off the ocean, lit a cigarette.

"So now what?" said Joe Bryan, waking up and taking the yellow cups off his eyes.

"This," said Tim, taking the script from under his arm.

"How you going to get a tan with a suit and tie on?"

"I just came out from the office

to deliver the final version of the script."

"All you people at the Igoe-Clackens Artists Corporation are pink from staying inside too much," said Bryan, sitting up. "Take off your shirt and get some sun."

"That's okay." Tim handed him the script.

"No, come on," said the agent. "I wish now I'd had the sun to enjoy when I was your age."

Sticking his cigarette into the sand, Tim took off his coat and loosened his tie. "Everybody

seems to like this version of the script. Frimjack may spring for the pilot film. The big problem is getting the right jungle to shoot it in."

Bryan rested the unopened TV script on his lap. "The shirt, too, take off," he said. "Everybody at Igoo-Glackens seems confident that my boy, Hunneker, is sewed up tight. Because he hasn't had a series or a movie in four years doesn't mean he's going to work for scale. He's still the best known jungle star in this town."

Tim folded up his button-down shirt and dropped it on the sand next to him. "Is Hunneker out here with you?"

"There was a shark scare about half hour ago and Hunneker jumped in to fight them." He flipped the mimeographed script open.

"That's dangerous."

"No, it's more than an hour since he had lunch," said the agent. "Lie down and enjoy the sun."

Tim stretched out on the warm sand and watched the sky. "Has Hunneker ever actually caught a shark?"

"He's killed fifty-three. And caught a lion in Laurel Canyon."

"How'd a lion get there?"

"Escaped from the circus." Bryan reached into a picnic hamper

at his side and got out a small cigar. Lighting it, he said, "This guy Ken Gillis who did the rewrite on this jungle half hour. Is he the one who used to work at the glazed fruit stand in Farmer's Market?"

"No, that's his agent you're thinking of."

"He doesn't understand Hunneker. There's not enough swimming in this."

"The whole first half takes place in the water."

"When people come back after the commercial there's no more swimming," said Bryan. "You familiar with Hunneker's film work?"

"From Saturday matinees, sure. I even won a souvenir Hunneker leopard skin when I was eleven."

"I don't want your autobiography," said the agent, clicking his teeth on his cigar. "What jungle they going to use for this series?"

"The one on the Wheelan lot probably."

"That's a Mickey Mouse jungle," said Bryan. "I'd like to see them fly Hunneker to India and shoot it all there. Or Africa, in some safe part."

"Igoo-Glackens is against run-away productions," said Tim. "Besides there's only \$50,000 going into the pilot. It has to be shot in and around Hollywood."

"You know that Mayer wanted to put a million into one of Hunneker's films. That was during the golden era."

A toe poked Tim's shoulder. He looked up at a pair of long tanned legs topped by a candy striped bathing suit. "Lucia," said Tim, getting to his feet.

Bryan frowned up at the girl. "Who's this?"

"Lucia Lampadusa," said Tim. "One of our secretaries."

"Come here," said Lucia, moving a few feet away. "I have a message for you."

"Why the bathing suit?"

"I know you were here at this beach. It makes a lot more sense than running around in a half a business suit."

"Okay. So what's the message?"

"The jungles have fallen through."

"For the Hunneker series? All of them?"

The silver blonde grimaced. "Wheelan says now his lot is tied up for six months and the jungle set on the old McNamara lot has come down with some kind of blight."

"That's great news, Tim said, making a face.

"You've got to drive down to San Amaro and talk to Belgraf."

"Who?"

"Vincent Belgraf. He has that big estate down in San Amaro. His hobby is jungle plants and his whole estate is mostly transplanted jungle. It was used in several of the old Hunneker movies."

"That's right," said Tim. "But it seems to me I heard Belgraf hasn't rented it out for years. That he won't anymore."

The tall blonde said, "Let's hope he resumes renting it."

"Why?"

"It's the only other jungle available and Mr. Igoe says if you don't sign it up . . . well, please sign it up, Tim."

"Did he say he'd fire me if I didn't?"

"You me and, three or four innocent bystanders."

"I can always go into the glazed fruit business," said Tim. He wanted to hang on to the Igoe-Glackers job. "What am I supposed to do?"

"Drive down there today. You can take up to two weeks off. Stay there until you get the jungle or else." She reached into the top of her swim suit. "Here."

"Two hundred dollars?"

"Expenses. Mr. Igoe says spend it all. But don't come back without the jungle."

"It's in fifty dollar bills. They'll be hard to break in San Amaro."

"I wasn't going to stuff two hundred in fives down my front," said Lucia. She glanced toward the ocean. "Isn't that Hunneker himself?"

"Where?"

"Coming out of the surf with that dead shark over his shoulder."

"So it is. Look, Lucia, you stay with Bryan and get the script back to the office. I'll start for San Amaro right now." Tim said goodbye to Bryan and picked up his clothes before Hunneker got too near.

"Don't speed now," called Lucia. "Mr. Igoo says he won't fire you for a full two weeks."

With his coat clamped between his knees Tim pulled his shirt on over his head and started up the beach toward the parking lot.

\* \* \*

## Chapter Two

At sundown Tim saw Wallace Berry standing at the side of the coast highway. He slowed his Plymouth and swung onto the gravel parking lot. As he was stepping out of the coupe a neon sign went on over the low shingle building beyond the gravel. WAX MUSEUM. FISH GROTTO. 100 STARS IN WAX. DINNERS FROM \$1.95.

Wallace Beery had a menu in his wax hand. Jean Harlow was behind the hatcheck counter, and in the dining room Rudolph Valentino was sitting at a table with Ross Alexander.

A small waiter in a dark suit stepped to Tim's side from a curtained alcove. "Yes, sir?"

"I was waiting for the band to play a tango. Then I thought I'd ask Valentino to dance."

"This isn't one of those kind of places, sir."

"I didn't mean with me."

"Very well. A table?"

"Fine." Tim followed the waiter down the three steps into the dining room. "Could I sit with Mabel Normand over there?"

The waiter shook his head. "Can't. Out of respect for the dead." He pulled out a chair at a small checkered table near the orchestra.

"Thank you," said Tim. He looked up at the bandstand. "They're wax, too?"

"It's the only way we could have a mixed group in this zone."

"Who's that on trumpet?"

"Bix."

"Ah, I thought so."

"We tried King Oliver out, but nobody knows him anymore," the waiter said sadly. "Besides, we accidentally put him by a window



and the hot sun melted him."

"Old trumpet players never die," Tim observed philosophically. "The Dorsey Brothers look good up there."

"We got them both together at a discount." The waiter opened a plastic-covered menu in front of Tim. "Don't eat the fruit in the bowl, by the way. It's wax."

Tim scanned the menu. "What do you suggest?"

"Eating someplace else," the waiter said, with a low chuckle to indicate he was just kidding. "Seriously, last time I checked the hangtown fry, it looked edible."

"Okay, I'll have that," Tim said, "and coffee. Is it okay if I smoke?"

"Go ahead. Our friends are supposed to be fireproof." He bowed and wandered out of the room between tables occupied by Harry Langdon and Oliver Hardy.

Tim lit a cigarette and looked around the room. He managed to recognize most of the wax people, but the thin young man at the next table puzzled him.

"Good evening," the thin young man said, turning to smile at him.

"Good evening," Tim said, gulping down his surprise.

"Would you happen to be heading down the coast by machine?"

"Yeah. As far as San Amaro."

The thin young man blinked and

looked quickly around. Lowering his head, he said in a conspiratorial tone, "Joining up?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Under the orange-and-gold?"

"I never play football," Tim confided.

"No, no," the thin young man said impatiently, "I mean, are you a recruit for the conquering army?"

Tim stared at him. "For the what?"

The thin young man waved a small hand negatively. "Never mind. My name's Sheldon E. Stone. Could you possibly drop me in San Amaro, somewhere in the vicinity of the Belgraf Estate?"

Tim ground out his cigarette. "That's where I'm going. Do you know the Belgraf family?"

Sheldon grinned proudly. "I've corresponded with old Mr. Belgraf's nephew, Nesbit, for nearly a year."

"Nesbit Belgraf," Tim mused, searching his memory. He snapped his fingers. "The sports car driver."

"I believe he was at one time," said Sheldon. "Quite a time ago. He's engaged in more constructive pursuits these days."

"Oh, like what?"

"Like saving the world from itself," Sheldon said seriously.

The waiter returned with two

plates of edible hangtown fry, and the two men busied themselves eating. The food wasn't too bad, but Tim found himself wondering if some of the images around them were once real people who'd eaten the food here and as a result had been turned to wax.

During the meal, Sheldon glanced nervously at Tim, opened his mouth several times as though to say something and then put some food in instead. A moment later they paid their bill and were installed in Tim's car, heading south.

"You're not a spy, are you?" said Sheldon E. Stone. He was sloped down in the car seat, cranking the window handle ahead one turn and then back one turn.

"No," said Tim. At their right the ocean was black and cold. "And stop futzing with that window."

"No, you're too nervous to be a spy."

"I think well come to the San Amaro turn off pretty soon."

"I'm sure I don't know. This is the first time I've been outside of Gerber, California."

"There's the sign. San Amaro, left lane."

Tim made the turn, and the road climbed upward.

A mile into the hills Sheldon said, "See there. Up at the crest of this incline."

"That blank wall, you mean."

"It keeps the curious back. That's the Belgraf estate."

Tim pulled off the road and parked under a willow tree. The ten foot high brick wall stretched for a good quarter mile. "There was a gate a few yards back," Tim said, getting out of the car.

Catching up his canvas suitcase Sheldon followed Tim to the solid wood gate. "Here at last."

There was a large E white-washed on the gate. No knocker or bell showed. "Well," said Tim.

"We'll have to find Gate J. That's the recruit gate."

A flashlight came on above then and shown on Tim and then swung over to Sheldon.

Sitting on top of the wall was a heavy set man in white flannels and a loose sweater. His legs were dangling and swinging slightly. "Tourist season ended about four years ago, folks," he said, tilting his rifle to point at them.

"Isn't there broken glass on top of that wall?" Tim asked.

"Not if you know where to sit."

"I'm a recruit," said Sheldon.

"That makes a difference. Get on down to Gate J. Recruits we always let in." He turned the gun

and the light on Tim. "How about you?"

"Where do I sign up?"

"Follow your buddy down to Gate J."

Once Tim got inside on the estate grounds he could explain. Right now, pretending to be a recruit was easier than getting shot. He recalled Sheldon's words about joining up to save the world from itself. It sounded kookie, and possibly dangerous. Tim began to wonder what he was getting himself into.

. . .

### *Chapter Three*

Gate J opened onto a long arched path that led to what looked like a large enclosed band pavillion. The guard at Gate J wore khaki bermuda shorts and a blue windbreaker.

"I suppose they don't wear uniforms where the public might see them," said Sheldon.

"You were expecting uniforms?" Tim said. Beyond the laths of the arbor there was sure enough a jungle thick and shadowy.

"You're not sympathetic," said Sheldon. "In my gratitude for getting directly here on my last hitch hike I may have spoken out of turn."

"Will Nesbit Belgraf meet us in the pavillion there?"

"Certainly not. We'll no doubt be taken charge of by one of his assistants."

The doors of the pavillion were open. Up where a gas chandelier had once hung someone had strung a line of Christmas tree bulbs. These provided the room's only light.

On the bandstand there was a card table and sitting behind it was a small middle-aged man in a flannel bathrobe.

"Why, that's Colonel Granger," whispered Sheldon as they entered.

"Out of uniform, too."

The colonel stood up. "Men. Welcome aboard. On behalf of our Commander I welcome you." He cleared his throat and motioned them forward. "As a result of some good-natured horseplay in the officer's mess I can not greet you in my usual attire."

Tim was trying to place the colonel. He knew he had seen him before. "Aren't you Joe Granger, the character actor?"

"I might be. We'll cover that in a future lecture. Now then, men. I think we'll all admit that there's no use going over our aims and goals since they are by now well-known to us. It is enough to say, keep 'em flying."

"Sir," said Sheldon.

"Yes, recruit?"

"Mr. McCarey here isn't actually a recruit. He's really here to see Mr. Vincent Belgraf and is only in this room because none of the other gates were open."

"This true, McCarey?"

"I'm from the Igoe-Clackens agency."

"Igoe-Clackens," said the colonel. "Well, now that you're here wouldn't you care to be sworn in? Seems wasteful to run through the whole ceremony for one recruit."

"I've come all the way from Gerber, California," said Sheldon, holding up his suitcase.

"We'll do it," said Colonel Granger. "I was hoping for a bigger audience."

"If you can tell me how to get to the main house," said Tim, "I'll get on with my job."

The colonel looked at his watch. "No. Not tonight. It's already much too late. You'd have to cross quite a stretch of jungle to get there. It's too late."

"Hardly nine."

"After eight no one is allowed to roam about." The colonel retied the cord on his robe and looked at Sheldon. Then he said, "McCarey, you go to the barracks. There are some empty bunks in Barracks G.

Upstairs. In the morning I'll get you an escort to the big house."

"There's no chance of . . ."

"None. Now hightail it out the back door and down the path there to the barracks. Carry on."

Tim nodded and went out the back of the pavillion. He stood in the darkness and waited until the colonel started talking again. When the ceremony seemed under way Tim started into the jungle.

The moonlight dropped down harsh and thin through the trees. Tim pushed by yards and yards of dark silhouettes as he tried to keep on one of the paths. The bright colors of the jungle were greyed and there was a moist quiet all around him.

He passed under what looked like drooping stocks of bananas. Stumbling, he bumped into a thicket of dry bamboo and set it to clattering.

Tim stopped and tried to get a fix on the main house. He was certain he had seen it earlier, seen its lights through the jungle.

A swirl of wind shook fat dead orchids down on him. Slapping the sticky flower off his coat Tim started for a path that led off the one he was on.

And then, far ahead and dead white, the great three-story Victorian house showed. Tim could

see patches of twisted gingerbread and poised gargoyles. There were lights on, windows filled with yellow.

He lit a cigarette and brushed the last orchid off his sleeve.

He was inhaling smoke when the crashing started behind him. It sounded as though a piece of machinery had broken loose and was rolling down hill at him. He turned. No sign of anything behind him, but the crashing and shaking grew louder.

"Get over here!" said a girl's voice.

"Christ!" yelled Tim. He spun back and saw her. "Sorry, I thought . . ."

"Come on," the girl said, catching his arm. "And be quiet." She pulled Tim off the path and through a stretch of spiked ferns.

This led them finally to a clearing circled by a dozen Swiss-looking cottages.

"Hurry up," the girl said, running across a cobblestone path and into the nearest cottage.

She was a slim brunette, wearing a short blue robe.

Tim followed her.

She pushed him at a fat antimacassered sofa chair and shut the thick door of the cottage, quietly locking and bolting it. "There now."

Tim noticed the fire in the fireplace and got up from the arm of the chair and stood in front of it. He found he was shivering. "I guess you saved me from something."

"Yes. Be still."

A heavy object hit the door.

The girl sighed and turned, leaning against the door. "He's only going to throw rocks." She smiled at Tim. "That won't be too much of a problem." The door rattled under another hit. "My name's Carolyn Loomis. I'm Mr. Belgraf's private secretary. Are you a trespasser or a poacher?"

"Neither. I'm Tim McCarey. I work for Igge-Clackens and I came down from Hollywood to see somebody about renting this jungle. Which Mr. Belgraf do you work for, Vincent or Nesbit?"

Carolyn ran her slender fingers through her dark feather-cut hair and laughed. "Mr. Nesbit Belgraf." One more rock hit the door. "Would you like a cup of coffee?"

"Yes, thanks." A fringe of white lace showed under the edge of the robe. "I woke you up stumbling around out there, didn't I?"

"I had dozed off." She shook her head. "I had a feeling I should open the door and look out. Though that's not too safe. Good thing I did."

"Now what was that I almost ran into?"

"Nothing to worry about."

"A wild animal of some kind?"

She nodded. "Something like that. You know much about dreams?"

"I've had them," Tim admitted.

Going into the kitchen she said, "Come along." She flipped on the lights. "I was dreaming I'd rented a bicycle."

There was a wide black stove at one end of the big room, an oak-en table in its center. Bright brass pots and pitchers dangled along the walls.

"Would it be possible to see Mr. Belgraf tonight?"

"No. Not after eight."

"Then tell me the dream."

"Well," Carolyn said, "I didn't have the right change and then the rental office blurred — you know the way they do — and I was playing tennis with a traffic cop. I never know what in the hell all these things mean." She filled a coffee pot from a flowered cannister.

"My uncle used to have a dream book. But that was only to help him predict the future."

"That's enough."

"The only thing he could ever predict was what was going to happen in Dick Tracy and Little

Orphan Annie. Sometimes he'd get as much as three or four weeks ahead of the story."

"Was he right?"

"Always." Tim took out his cigarettes. "Smoke?"

"No, thanks. But go ahead." She had high cheekbones, faint shadows beneath her eyes. A small careful smile.

"I know we're hardly old friends but can't you tell me what's going on here?"

"No."

"Okay."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty-seven."

"You're not a boy flash like Thalberg or Selznick or one of those cats?"

"No. Just an assistant to Mr. Igooe."

"I thought so. You're too easy to put off. Not that that's a bad thing. I had a hunch you weren't in charge of anything."

"I'm not."

The coffee began to perk. "Don't let the s.o.b.'s get you."

"That's good advice."

"I'm alone a lot out here." She smiled. "My vocabulary is a result of my chatting with myself quite often."

He watched her pour the coffee into two heavy tan mugs. "How do I go about getting off the

grounds and into town tonight?"

"You can't get off tonight. It's not safe." She handed him a cup of coffee. "You'll have to stay here."

"Where?"

"The window seat."

"In it?"

"On it. And I mean you stay *there*. No wise stuff. Don't come skulking into my room just because I saved you from — well, from some trouble and gave you a hot drink."

"No, ma'm."

"And don't expect me to come tiptoeing in to see you in the middle of the night. The floor's too cold for that."

"Look," said Tim, "I never get personal with a girl the first day I meet her. Maybe it's old-fashioned, but it's my code."

"Would you like to sit by the fire in the front room and tell ghost stories?"

"No."

"We'll talk then." She left the kitchen.

Tim turned off the lights and joined her. "Do you think Mr. Belgraf will rent us his jungle?"

She shrugged. "You ask too many questions."

"It's my job."

"You can talk to him." She sat

on the thick rug and watched the fire.

Tim shook his head and dropped into the sofa chair. He shivered as he heard the sounds of claws scratching at the door.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Four*

The orange and blue macaw squawked up off the window sill and Tim rolled over to see Carolyn Loomis standing in the kitchen doorway. She was wearing a short black skirt and a white blouse. She was holding a glass of tomato juice.

"Good morning," Tim said.

"Do you always sleep with your coat and tie on?"

"I thought we might be attacked again." He blinked his eyes, stood up, taking the glass of juice she held out to him.

"You'll have to see Laura before you can get in to talk to Mr. Belgraf," Carolyn said.

"Who's she?" He brushed his palm over his crewcut.

"Laura Belgraf, Nesbit's sister. Mr. Belgraf is their uncle."

Tim looked over his shoulder. The macaw was back on the sill watching him. "What time could I see her?"

"Right now. I made an appoint-

ment while you were sleeping." Carolyn moved to the front door. "The john's off to the left there. I'm going on up to the house. I'm sure I'll run into you later in the day."

Tim finished the tomato juice and turned to give the parrot an obscene gesture.

The jungle outside was brightening in the morning sun, red and yellow flowers sparkled in among the palm trees.

The path to the big white house was paved with flagstones which gave a little underfoot.

The transplanted jungle stretched high all around Tim. Not watching, Tim almost stepped on a peacock. He dodged as the bird galloped away.

From some distance behind him came a vague tramping sound. Not something following him. Maybe something doing down at the barracks.

Around a turn in the path there was a little old man spread-eagled on a patch of moss.

"Hey," said Tim, running and kneeling by the white-suited man.

"Playing dead," the old man said. He had a pink face and tightly curling white hair. "Don't be alarmed."

Tim helped him up. "You okay?"

"Yes, more's the pity. I'm Dr.

Leonard Jackstone." He grunted to his feet. "How are you?"

"Tim McCarey."

"No, I said *how* are you. Coming down with something perhaps."

"I don't think so. Do I look sick?"

"Unfortunately not." He shook his round head. "Perhaps if I gave you a thorough examination something would turn up. A nice complex disease."

"I'm only here for the day."

"You wouldn't care to have your appendix out, on spec?"

"I've had it out. Tonsils, too."

"I get restless," said the old doctor. "Are you going up to the main house?"

"I'm supposed to see Laura Belgraf."

The doctor bobbed and smiled, taking Tim's arm. "That's good news." He squinted one eye and studied Tim's head. "Haven't had a good fracture to work on in over a year."

"You expect Miss Belgraf will fracture my skull in the course of our interview?"

"She has a fondness for projectiles. She once threw a complete set of Thackeray at me. And he was a prolific writer." He laughed softly. "It was a lark patching myself up."

"How about the men at the barracks?"



"Once in a while we get a case of food poisoning. Mostly they go in for sprains and bruises."

"How many men are there down at the barracks?"

The doctor shook his head. "Here we are at the house."

Directly in front of them was the house. Big and white, loaded down with gingerbread, gargoyles, stained glass, iron work.

And in the shadows of the wide front porch an old striped swing was creaking slowly back and forth.

"That's Laura," the doctor whispered. He tapped Tim's arm. "I'll be in Cottage 7 if you need me." He touched his forehead and howled toward the dark figure on the swing. Then he hurried back into the jungle.

"McCarey?"

"Miss Belgraf?" Tim came to the foot of the wooden steps.

She didn't answer.

"I'm from Igoo-Clackens. In Hollywood."

"Come up here, McCarey."

"Yes, ma'm."

The girl on the swing was younger than he'd expected. Not more than twenty. She was wearing white tennis shorts, a black jersey sweater and Japanese sandals. Her long blonde hair was tied back with a black ribbon.

"What sort of work do you do for those people?"

"Junior agent stuff. Some public relations. Publicity."

"Like a heer, McCarey?"

"Not at this time, no, ma'm."

"How about a Spanish omelet?"

"Thanks. I'm not hungry, Miss Belgraf."

The girl jumped up and stretched her arms over her head. Her jersey slid up and a hand of smooth tanned skin showed. "My office is inside, McCarey."

"Yes, ma'm."

The front door of the house was open a few inches and Laura Belgraf pushed inside.

A deep brown hallway stretched clear through the house, lost in dim sunlight and drifting dust at its end. Just inside the door was an umbrella rack held up by four plaster figures that resembled the Hearst Puck. A tarnished silver hat rack was thick with dusty howlers and homburgs and one checkered golf cap with a union button stuck on the brim.

Laura stepped through a headed curtain, clacking green and blue glass heads.

Following, Tim found her seated in a swivel chair with her feet up on a closed roll top desk. "What was it you wanted to see my uncle about, McCarey?"

"The jungle, Miss Belgraf. Igoo-Clackens is interested in filming a TV series here. In fact, it will star Lonnie Hunneker, who, if I'm not mixed up, filmed a few of his best known pictures here in the past."

Laura kicked one foot so that the sandal flipped off and somersaulted into her hand. "We don't rent it anymore."

"Something else seems to be going on here."

She frowned.

"Maybe I could talk to your uncle."

"Nesbit would never allow it," she said, standing and then hopping till she got the sandal back on. "We are involved in more important work."

"Could I talk to Nesbit, then?"

Coming up to him she said, "Let's see your papers, McCarey."

"Ma'im?"

"Your identification." She started to frisk him.

"Oof," he said. "I don't keep my wallet there." He got it out of his back pocket and opened it to her. "There."

Laura took the wallet and walked to the window. "Who's the girl?"

"A friend of mine."

"Who? What's her name? Are you engaged?"

"Her name's Kathleen and no we're not."

"She's pudgy, isn't she?"

"Only weighs a hundred pounds."

"Catch," said Laura, throwing the wallet at him.

"Do I check out?"

"Seems like." Laura tugged at her ponytail. "Papers could be faked. Nesbit's explained the methods to me. You've never heard of my brother?"

"He used to race. I think I may even have seen him once at Pebble Beach. Tall, lanky guy."

Laura turned and put the fingertips of her left hand on the window pane. She slowly traced the pattern the leading made. "Nesbit doesn't race now. He's one of the most penetrating political thinkers of our time." She glanced round at Tim. "Haven't you heard of his books?"

"Does he write under his own name?"

"Yes. I'll give you some." She crossed to a shelved cabinet. After a moment she said, "Damn." She dropped onto a hassock and bit her knuckle.

Tim came up behind her. "What is it?"

"I can't find them." She hit her fist into her palm. "Damn, damn."

He put his hand on her shoulder.

"I can look them up at the public library."

"No. Not Nesbit's books. There's a conspiracy." She hunched her shoulder blades back against his hand and tossed her hair once. Turning she caught Tim's arm and pulled herself up. "Are you a good publicity man?"

"Fair."

She tilted her head slightly, studying his face. "Would you be interested in working for us?"

"I don't think so. I'm happy with the job I've got."

She stepped back. "Goodbye, McCarey. Thanks for dropping by. I'll have you escorted off the grounds."

"Then I can't see your uncle?"

"Not unless you agree to help us. I like you," she said. "I'm sure you're a very good publicity and propaganda man."

Tim had two weeks to sign up the Belgraf jungle. Maybe if he pretended to go to work here he could talk old Belgraf into some sort of deal. It was either that or look for a new job altogether.

"Well, maybe I could give it a try."

Laura laughed and went to the desk. "I'm glad." She handed him a large gold key. "Cottage 8. I have to do some work for Nesbit

now. I'll get back to you this afternoon."

"If I'm going to be staying here I'll have to get some stuff from L.A. Clothes, shaving gear and so on. And I left my car parked out by the wall last night."

Laura shook her head. "Your car's been taken care of. As for the rest — I think Nesbit has a shaving kit he can spare. Also some clothes. We'll need you right away quick. We can't spare you for a trip to Hollywood."

"I'll have to make some phone calls at least."

"There's a phone in your cottage." Without speaking further she left through a doorway beyond the book cases.

Tim turned the key over in his hand several times and then made his way out of the house and into the jungle.

He let himself into cottage 8 and tried to make the phone work. A macaw tightrope along the window sill, watching him.

Tim reached his cigarettes off the carved wood table and went on clicking the cradle up and down. Nothing happened.

Tim put the phone back on its shelf under the table and lit a cigarette. He watched the parade of elves that decorated the base of the table and then he stood up.

Outside he crossed over to the cottage he figured must be Dr. Jackstone's. He knocked on the door and waited.

Carolyn's cottage was number 3, across the clearing. She was still up at the main house.

The door of the doctor's cottage snapped open and someone in a green uniform pushed Tim out of the way and ran across the clearing. The bright gold epaulets flashed as the uniformed figure caught a low hanging vine and pulled itself up. There were saucer size gold spurs on the slick boots.

But instead of hands there were paws.

"A gorilla in a soldier suit," Tim said, wonderingly.

Inside the doctor's place there were magazines scattered across the living room floor. "Dr. Jackstone."

"Over here," said the doctor dimly.

Tim found Jackstone behind a roll top desk with his head pinned in the lid. "Here." Tim forced the desk carefully open and pulled the flushed doctor out. "You all right?"

Dr. Jackstone felt his neck and the back of his head. "I'm afraid so."

"Was that a gorilla I saw rushing out of here?"

The doctor nodded. "He got

mad. These weekly examinations are upsetting him more and more."

"They shouldn't let that thing run around loose if it's dangerous."

The doctor smiled. "Indeed?"

"Can I get you a glass of water or something?"

"No, no." The doctor reached into a white cabinet and took out a fistful of small pill bottles. "I'll try some these."

Tim bent and gathered up the magazines. They were all at least four years old. "I'm going to be staying here in Cottage 7 — for awhile."

"I imagined you might," said the doctor, shaking some round yellow pills into his cupped palm. He brought them up close to his left eye, then shook out three green capsules from another bottle.

"What are my chances of getting to talk to old Mr. Belgraf?"

"I can't say. You never know."

"Well," said Tim, "they all seem to feel that Nesbit has a lot to say about what goes on around here. Will I get a chance to see him?"

Dr. Jackstone tilted his hand and let the assortment of pills slide onto his tongue. He swallowed twice and said, "You just did. That was him — the gorilla in the uniform."

He smiled and began to put the bottles away.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Five*

Tim lowered himself to the leather cushioned window seat. "I always thought Nesbit Belgraf was a tall skinny guy."

"He was," replied Dr. Jackstone, "before the operation."

"That's some after-effect," said Tim. "What operation?"

The round little doctor raked the fingers of his left hand in among the stiff white curls at his temple. "It all began," he said.

Across the court a phone rang. "Is that for me?" Tim said.

Jackstone nodded. "Yes, that's your ring I'd say."

Tim jumped up and ran to the door. "Maybe it's about my outside call."

"Run," urged Dr. Jackstone. "There's always the chance you'll strain something."

Tim cut across the bright after noon flagstones. He got the phone out of its niche and grabbed up the receiver. "Yes?"

"Nine rings, McCarey," said the voice of Laura Belgraf.

"Speaking of telephones," he said, catching his breath. "I can't seem to get through to Hollywood."

"Be up here in ten minutes," Laura said. "For preliminary talks with my uncle." She hung up.

Tim considered throwing the phone out into the thick jungle. But in a few seconds he was able to hang it up and shrug. The job with Igoo-Glackens was important to him. He'd been in Hollywood five years and he'd had worse jobs. Too, he'd been out of work for eleven months once and it seemed to him now that he'd spent that whole time standing in the unemployment office in Santa Monica trying to explain himself. Tim wanted experiences like that to be only a part of his past. He had to hold on at the agency. That meant trying to get the Belgrafs to rent a part of their damn jungle.

Outside, Dr. Jackstone was resting against a window box. "Going to dash up to the main house?"

"Yeah. Mr. Belgraf wants to see me."

Jackstone tilted his head and cupped a hand to his ear. "Is that a wheeze I hear you developing?"

Tim cleared his throat. "There is one thing I'm worried about, doctor. Am I likely to run into that gorilla between here and the main house?"

"No," said Dr. Jackstone. "He's with the troops by now."

"Fine," said Tim. "We'll have the rest of our talk later, doctor." He started for the trail that led to the big Belgraf place.

"If you go crazy with the heat be sure and send for me." Jackstone waved and went inside his cottage.

As Tim hiked, he had a strong feeling that peacocks were watching him. But not a one showed itself. The jungle hung limp and exhausted in the warmth of the afternoon. A small yellow bird hopped across his path and later a dozen blue butterflies flapped close.

Tim heard the porch swing creak and then Laura was up and standing at the top step. She was wearing a pair of grey tapered slacks now and a sleeveless gold colored blouse. Her blonde hair was still tied back with the black ribbon. "You have a funny idea of what ten minutes is, McCarey."

"Yes. Several scientists are interested in the idea, and I'm planning to read a paper on it soon."

The girl wrinkled her nose. "You seem to grow surlier as the day progresses, McCarey."

"Sorry, ma'm," he said, reaching her side.

Laura gripped his elbow. "Inside."

They went farther down the

dim brown hallway this time, stopping in front of a highly polished oak door.

Knocking, Laura called out, "It's McCarey finally, Uncle Vincent."

The door snapped open inward. "As to the jungle," said Vincent Belgraf. He was a small, thin man, his shoulders dipped forward and his chest curved in. He had fine spun white hair and was wearing a loose black suit. While Tim and Laura were coming into the room he began pacing on the flowered throw rug in front of the empty fireplace. "There is," he continued, "just barely, the distinct possibility that a portion of the jungle might be rentable."

Laura put Tim into a brown leather armchair. "Providing certain conditions are fulfilled," she said.

The room seemed all filing cabinets, old wooden ones, and framed photos. The photos were old, too, and Tim couldn't make out who the people grouped in any of them were. "The condition being that I help you folks for a few days?"

Vincent Belgraf widened the circle of his pacing until he brushed against a ball footed wooden desk. "A few days, almost certainly. We sincerely trust the period of extreme crisis will not exceed a matter of days."

"Usually we don't," said Laura, putting her back flat against a tower of file drawers, "have visitors at all. We are able to keep out strangers."

"Tight security," said Vincent Belgraf. "Who is your boss at Igoo-Glackens?"

"Mr. Igoo."

"Joel Igoo?"

"Yes."

Belgraf tapped the desk top and found a memo pad. "We'll add that name to this wire."

"Phone communication to the outside has been spotty," explained Laura.

"I'd noticed," said Tim. "What's the wire say?"

Belgraf read it. "Negotiations rolling merrily along. Belgraf in jolly mood. Need a wee bit more time. Will report again in not too many days."

"You've captured my style."

Tearing off the memo sheet Belgraf handed it to Laura. "See that that message gets on the bakery wagon this afternoon."

Laura folded the note and slipped it into a slash pocket of her slacks. "We've decided to admit a few things, McCarey."

Tim sat up. Here comes the gorilla, he thought. "Well, good."

Old Belgraf edged around behind his desk. "First off," he said,

"our public relations are bad. The public has little or no idea about our ideals, our aims and goals."

"That stone wall probably discourages them," said Tim.

"Secondly," continued Belgraf, "our propaganda isn't having as much of an effect as it should." He shook his head and his milk white hair fluttered. "We have the ultimate answers to oh-so-many problems. And our main plan will force them all to realize that. However, we don't wish to pass up the golden opportunity tossed in our laps by the president's untimely end. No. We have to step things up in the public relations line."

"In the coming days," said Laura, "with your expert advice to help us, McCarey, our publicity and propaganda should shape up just fine."

Belgraf's freckled hands were flapping, shuffling papers. "Expenses, expenses," he said. "Was there ever a great movement in history that didn't cost?"

"About tonight," Laura said.

"The price of liberty is high," said Belgraf. "Come to dinner tonight."

"At seven," said Laura. "Cocktails first. We've sent clothes and such over to you."

"Money," said Belgraf, sinking low into his swivel chair.

"Thank you for your time, uncle," said Laura, motioning Tim up.

"Yes," said Tim.

Outside in the hallway Laura said, "Be on your toes tonight, wear a dark suit and try not to be too surly."

"Okay," he said. "Why?"

"You're going to meet Nesbit."

. . .

## Chapter Six

It was the first time Tim had seen a gorilla in a dinner jacket. He looked from Laura to her uncle and they seemed to be serious about it. So he reached out and shook hands with the gorilla. "Glad to meet you, Mr. Belgraf."

"Nesbit," said the gorilla in a deep, slightly burred voice. "We're all friends here."

Nesbit looked real. The hand was harsh and furry and the head didn't look like a prop. Tim hadn't been able to talk to Dr. Jackstone again, since the doctor had gone off to tend to the troops. And Carolyn didn't seem to be around anywhere. So Tim hadn't been able to find out exactly why Nesbit appeared to be a gorilla. "Nesbit, it is," he said.

The living room was large, with a high, beamed ceiling. There were Navajo rugs on the buff

colored plaster walls and a fringed Spanish shawl hung on the closed grand piano near the French windows. In the center of the room there were three sofas, old and fat, set at angles around a clear spot of hardwood floor. "A Beefeater martini?" asked old Vincent Belgraf, sitting on the green sofa.

Nesbit took the black sofa. "Just a little Cutty Sark for me, Laura. With hardly any ice."

Laura moved to a portable bar near Tim. "McCarey?"

He was watching Nesbit, trying to spot any seams or zippers.

"Beg pardon?"

"To drink?"

"Scotch is fine."

One of the wheels of the portable bar was flat and when Laura picked up the ice tongs the whole thing rattled and then lurched toward Tim. "Thanks, McCarey," Laura said when he caught the bar and kept it upright. "A slow leak. Stick a match book under it."

Tim did, watching the girl. She had on a simple black cocktail dress that pushed her breasts slightly together. Her skin was smooth and tanned and there was a faint line of freckles scattered just below one shoulder. "There," he said, giving the bar a test shove. "Seems okay now."



"You can join me in a Mai Tai, McCarey."

"Scotch is fine."

"You already said that, McCarey."

"I stick to my guns."

She poured two glasses of Scotch, dropped ice cubes into one and handed both to Tim. "It's the butler's night off. Mind taking that to Nesbit."

"Sure, fine."

Nesbit Belgraf's left paw was coarse and furry, too. "Thank you," he said, taking the drink. The hand was warm, which a gorilla suit wouldn't be.

The living room door opened. Tim turned, hoping Carolyn might be coming to dinner, too. It was a tall thick paratrooper in a green uniform. The uniform consisted of green paratrooper pants with silver jump boots, a green shirt and black tie and a green blousecoat with silver piping. The man's cap was silver-visored and he wore it crushed down on the back of his round crewcut head. "How do you light the crapping oven?" he asked.

Nesbit dropped his glass and jumped up. An odd rumble sounded in his chest. "Corporal Wilkie. Your manner of entry is far from correct."

Wilkie salute dand came near-

er. "Sorry, Chief. But the crapping oven won't light. It's not like the mess stove." He noticed Tim and smiled tentatively at him. "I've got a lovely roast but it won't do any good if the crapping oven is on the fritz."

Standing, Vincent Belgraf said, "Some along, Wilkie. I'll straighten it out." He moved between Nesbit and the corporal and backed Wilkie toward the door.

"I'll see you at my office at 0700 tomorrow," Nesbit said, his arms arching out at his sides and his nostrils enlarging.

"Not if you want breakfast," said Wilkie. "You get rid of the cook and rush me into the gap, you've got to make allowances."

"To the kitchen," said Vincent Belgraf quietly and nudged Wilkie out through the doorway.

Nesbit spun around and glared at Tim. His eyes were yellow and bloodshot. They narrowed and Nesbit brought a paw up in front of them.

"Sit down, Nesbit," said Laura, "and I'll fix you a new drink."

The gorilla noticed the unbroken glass on the slick floor and kicked it away with his opera-slipped foot. He dropped to the black sofa. "We have something of a servant problem," he said finally to Tim.

Laura brought a new glass of ice-

less Scotch to Nesbit, patting his arm. "That's just Wilkie's way."

"It's a question of discipline."

"You'll adjust him in time," the girl said. She knelt and wiped up the spilled Scotch with a bar towel.

The gorilla rested a paw on her bare back and tilted his large head to one side. "Laura's a lovely girl, isn't she?"

"Well, yes," agreed Tim.

"Well, thank you, McCarey," said Laura as she rose. "I thought you went in more for the chubby types."

Nesbit made a coughing sound and jiggled his head. He poked at his black bow tie with a thick finger. "It goes on quietly even while we sit here," he said. "The invisible conquest. They've gotten to more cooks and domestics than you think."

"They?" asked Tim.

Laura seated herself next to Tim. "Certain elements."

"Do you realize," said Nesbit, "that they control sixty-five percent of all outdoor swimming pools. Not to mention nearly all Jewish delicatessens and at least one large toothpaste company."

Tim said, "Who?"

"You see how simple it will be," continued Nesbit, rocking. "When the order is given. Missiles, bombs, rockets." He laughed suddenly and Tim jerked back. "Forget bombs

and planes and radar and fallout shelters. Forget food supply stock piles and tin hats and Geiger counters. They control seventy percent of our five and ten cent stores already and their control creeps increasingly. They own two or perhaps, more frighteningly, three motorcycle companys. Our do-nothing government knows it, too. They also won a major frozen food company. They simply won't need open warfare. They can skulk on cat feet." Nesbit's giant fingers scurred off his lap and around the sofa cushions. "When the order is given, and given it will be, they simply put their plan into effect. They may well be, unheeded by our ostrichesque government, putting it into effect right now. Germs, brainwashes, little tricks. That's them. You dive into the pool and come up a hopeless slave. You bite into a seemingly innocent hot pastrami sandwich and your mind is no longer your own. You jump up in the morning and brush your teeth with their insidious toothpaste and it attacks your gums and before you know it you've lost your patriotism and, if they use a certain formula long since perfected, your virility as well."

"This is the Communist movement you're talking about?" Tim asked.

Nesbit laughed again. Tim was

ready for it this time and kept himself from jumping. "You, too," said the gorilla. "You believe exactly what they want you to. The poor simple commies, a lot *they* know." He rocked with laughter now and fell back with his hairy hands flapping and his wide flat feet thumping the hard floor. "You poor simple man. The commies are dupes like the rest of our so-called politicians."

"I wanted McCarey to read some of your books, Nesbit," Laura said.

"I had to rip up many of them," said Nesbit, his laughter fading. To Tim he said, "They've gotten to the printers. I noticed, on re-reading, that they'd made them put in a great number of typographical errors that did grave damage to the logical development of my expose." Nesbit's paws became large black fists. "Logic, logic, damn them, is all they'll listen to. You have to think, use your intellect, make them think in turn." He paused. "By them, in this context, I mean the so-called public. The self-styled masses."

"We've just installed our own printing press," Laura said. "There shouldn't be any more trouble."

"If they don't get to Rasmussen," said Nesbit.

"Rasmussen is our printer."

"Now," said Tim, "what is it exactly you'd like me to do?"

"Laura's been getting up a dossier on you and she says you're ninety percent clean, which is all we can hope for. They've got control of a good part of Hollywood, too. But Laura says you're okay."

"Thanks," said Tim.

Laura smiled along the rim of her glass. "We don't have to go into specifics tonight, Nesbit. McCarey will be getting together with me in the morning."

Nesbit chuckled. "I feel confident, Laura."

Vincent Belgraf came quietly back and resumed his sofa. "It may take some time for dinner. Wilkie insists on the roast."

"I wonder," said Nesbit, "if they've gotten to Wilkie." He steepled his fingers and closed one eye thoughtfully.

At the head of the dinner table the gorilla rested his elbows on the bright white cloth. His lips flared up over his teeth and he said, "Everybody is willing to concede that democracy has had its chance."

Old Vincent Belgraf rotated his wine glass between his palms and glanced toward the swing door to the kitchen. "The notion that this is a republic we live in is outmoded as well."

The gorilla's head bobbed positively. "An empire," he said, beaming down at Tim.

"I see," said Tim.

"Virility," said Laura.

"Beg pardon?"

"An emperor must have virility," the girl explained. "He must be an image of forcefulness and masculinity."

"Events," said Nesbit, leaning back in the chair. "Events are on the move and the new leader must step forth."

"People want answers," said Belgraf. He asked Tim, "Do you think we should include television in our propaganda plans? It's costly."

Nesbit waved a paw in Tim's direction. "Yes, what's your feeling on that?"

"You mean, you'd appear on TV?"

"I'd insist on a full half-hour to myself," said the gorilla. "Commercials are too restrictive."

Tim had a vision of Nesbit breaking into the middle of an old William Powell movie. He studied his fork. "Yeah, a whole show would be more effective."

"You're coming up with some good suggestions already," said Belgraf. He made a low sighing sound and slid his chair sideways, rising up carefully. "It's been a half-hour since the chicken gumbo soup. I'll see what's delaying Wilkie." He shuffled into the kitchen.

"You're not getting a good im-

pression of the efficiency of our set-up," Laura said, smiling across the wide table.

Nesbit's teeth clicked and his eyes grew wide. His head ticked and he grunted. "I'm losing my patience. I'm losing my patience."

The kitchen door swung loudly open and Wilkie appeared. He was in uniform still but had added a chef's hat with *Chief Cook And Bottle Washer* embroidered on it. "This needling of me has got to knock off," he said. "I can't cook with people always looking over my shoulder."

Laura inhaled sharply. "It's all right, Nesbit."

Nesbit's chair somersaulted away and landed on its side at the temporary chef's feet. The gorilla raised his arms high and then, lunging, leaped for Wilkie.

"Oh, boy," said Wilkie. He dodged into the dining room, heading for the French windows.

Nesbit roared and dived. He caught Wilkie, knocked him down and jumped on his back.

Wilkie said, "Oof."

The gorilla snatched the man up, hugged him, and bounced him harshly up and down. Then Nesbit spun him overhead and flipped him. Wilkie was briefly on the table, his limp body made a C, and then he thudded onto the floor.

Nesbit raised his arms again, threw his black tie at Laura, smashed through the French windows and went crashing away into the darkness.

Vincent Belgraf stepped in from the kitchen. "Nesbit is very excitable," he said calmly. "Many great men are."

Laura shook her head, her face was pale and she kept swallowing. "You really aren't getting a good impression of our household operations, McCarey."

"I'll call Dr. Jackstone," said Tim, dropping down next to Wilkie. "He should be back from the infirmary by now."

Corporal Wilkie seemed to be still breathing. Dr. Jackstone had a new patient.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Seven*

Two privates in green and silver fatigues carried the stretcher into the dark jungle. Dr. Jackstone watched, perched on the porch rail. He rocked roundly back and forth, absently depressing his tongue with a thumb-shaped wooden stick and humming. "Ah, ah, ah, ah, ah."

Tim lit a cigarette. He and the doctor were alone on the shadowy porch of the Belgraf house. "So how is Wilkie?"

"A little shock," said Jackstone,

sliding the depressor into his coat pocket. "Wind knocked out of him. That's about all. More's the pity."

Is it a good idea to send him down to the infirmary tonight?" Tim asked, swinging himself up on the rail next to the doctor. "Nesbit is still out there someplace, roaming around."

"There is the possibility that he'll do something urastic to the other two fellows," said Dr. Jackstone. "There's always that hope. Anyway, Laura doesn't think it's a good idea to leave Wilkie here tonight. Nesbit will eventually calm down and come back home. She doesn't want him to get upset all over again."

Glancing back at the closed front door Tim said, "That gorilla really is Nesbit Belgraf?"

Jackstone fished his stethoscope out of an inside pocket of his white suit and hooked it over his plump neck. "Nesbit is my greatest medical triumph," he said. "But not one medical journal has ever written it up. Remember Dr. Dafoc? The bundle of money he made just for delivering five little French Canadian girls. Nothing to that."

"But Nesbit?"

"You remember him from his racing days?"

"Sure," said Tim. "I saw him at Pebble Beach once. Big suntanned guy, lean."

"Then," said the doctor, "yes. Some four years ago Nesbit, as a result of a discussion with his Uncle Vincent over the communistic nature of income tax, got interested in politics. At first he contented himself with the wide variety of groups that the Los Angeles area has to offer." Jackstone listened to his own chest for a moment. "The main thing wrong with these other groups was that they already had leaders. Nesbit Belgraf, you know, is a born leader. Thus, with Vincent Belgraf's backing, he began to recruit his own group. Simple political agitation wasn't enough and the army idea followed. Barracks were erected here and the wall built around the estate."

"That was about the time Belgraf stopped renting out the jungle."

"They never really needed the rental fees," said Dr. Jackstone. "With Nesbit and his army there was excitement around all the time, not just on the occasions when Hollywood came down and Hunneker or somebody was swinging form limb to limb and yodeling."

"Okay," said Tim, "I understand about the army now. Not the gorilla."

"Oh, this is a new army," Jackstone said. "The original was only a few dozen fellows Nesbit gathered up from unemployment lines.

Race bums, garage hangers-on, surfers. The problem was that Nesbit, the old Nesbit, was a stubborn and violent sort of person. One evening his army gave up on the whole idea. Back at that juncture I was simply the family doctor, having a practice of my own on the outside."

"These guys turned on Nesbit? Jumped him?"

The doctor spun the listening piece of the stethoscope by its tube. "That's right. He looked like the residue of a street rumble when I got here. The troops had, by that time, scattered to the winds. They even hurned part of the old barracks. Nesbit himself was dying."

"Where'd the gorilla come from?"

"Yes, the gorilla," said Jackstone. "As part of his jungle collection Vincent Belgraf had a small zoo. It consisted, at the period of Nesbit's accident, of a leopard, two elderly lions, four ostriches, a zebra and a gorilla. Plus a few tailless monkeys and an anteater." The doctor smiled, his eyes nearly closing. "I'd always had a hankering to transplant a brain. It was a hobby I'd fooled with for decades, ever since my student days at Stanford Medical. Here then, at last, was the opportunity. Nesbit couldn't possibly survive, even by rushing him the twenty-two miles to the nearest hospital. I therefore

suggested saving at least his brain, which happily enough was in tip-top shape."

"They agreed, just like that?"

"Of course," said Jackstone. "They admired Nesbit's intellect as much as the rest of him. Laura was just seventeen then. Nesbit was twenty-five. He was her favorite heroic figure, her favorite philosopher as well. Yes, both Uncle Vincent and Laura agreed to let me try a transplant. I'd hoped for a human being. The troops, as I've said, were off and running. The butler was in his late sixties and hardly the leader type. That left the animals. A gorilla isn't the best bet for a brain transplant, you know." The doctor shrugged. "But Nesbit as a leopard or a zebra was out of the question. A gorilla it had to be."

"How come he can talk and all?"

Jackstone's eyes widened and he grinned. "All due to my work. This little medical trick here is one of the wonders of modern science." He sighed. "But not one journal or popular big-circulation magazine will ever know of it."

"How'd he get the new troops?"

"While Nesbit was adjusting to his new self he began writing, putting his views into book form. His point of view, having an answer for every current problem, attracted some. The rest have been recruited

by the Belgrafs. The pay is very good."

"Do you think the present army will be more loyal than the last batch?"

The doctor pressed his chubby fingers in among his stiff white curls. "There could be more trouble. Nesbit, as you must realize by now, has not mellowed with the years. He is, in fact, becoming more and more like the darned gorilla."

The front door creaked, swung in. "McCarey?"

Tim dropped from the rail onto the porch.

"I'll be getting to my new patient," said Dr. Jackstone. "Goodnight, all."

Tim said goodnight and went in to see what Laura wanted.

There was no moonlight and the shortcut path to the cottages grew narrower and narrower. "You have to admit, McCarey," said Laura, up ahead of him on the dark trail, "that it's thoughtful of me."

"Yes, ma'm," said Tim.

Somehow, there was an iron grill-work bench a little off the overgrown path, nudged back in among flat-leaved bushes. When Tim caught up Laura was sitting on the bench, her legs crossed and one black shoe swinging from her toe.

"How many other clients," she

said, "would show you a quick way home after a business dinner?"

"You're the first client who's ever guided me through a jungle at eleven o'clock at night," said Tim, stopping. "I don't know much about woodlore but shouldn't you keep your shoes on?"

The girl shrugged one shoulder and the shoes arced free and fell into the high grass. "McCarey," she said. "Something really funny."

"What?"

"I actually like you, McCarey."

Tim watched her, nodding.

"Not this surface personality you have," Laura continued, "which I imagine is applied to you by your Hollywood bosses."

"Two coats of personality and one of varnish."

"It's the you underneath I like, McCarey." She cupped her hands over her knee and smiled. "I like the shape of your head, too. McCarey, as soon as we get the propaganda off the ground we'll have more spare time."

"Gloriosky," said Tim.

Laura tilted her head slightly to one side, studying him. "Be surly if you like, McCarey. I'm never wrong about men I'm going to grow fond of. You're in line."

"So far," said Tim, "I've never stood in line for anybody who called me McCarey, ma'm."

"You're just not a Tim to me," she said.

A ripe orange hit the free side of the bench and rind fragments splashed Laura and Tim. Tim spun around, but could see no one. After the orange came a banana and five papayas.

Laura had jumped up. Finding her shoe she said, "He's watching us." Her ponytail flicked at her bare shoulders as she shook her head. "He gets very excited meeting new people sometimes. It means you made a good impression on him."

"That's Nesbit out there?"

"He'll calm down," Laura said. She braced herself against him with one hand and tugged on her black shoe. "Wilkie angered him. Nesbit has to work out his anger and excitement." She stood free and called, "Nesbit, it's all right." To Tim she said, "Go on down the path. You'll find your cottage with no trouble."

"You're staying here?"

"I'll talk to him and he'll come home eventually." She touched Tim's arm. "Be at the house at nine in the morning. And don't forget what I've said, McCarey."

"No, ma'm."

Tim started away. A mushy orange hit him hard in the back but he didn't turn around.



*Chapter Eight*

Tim had sponged Neshit-flung orange from the back of the suit coat and hung it over the shower curtain rod. From his overstuffed chair in the main room of the cottage he could see one dark sleeve hanging. He lunged up and closed the bathroom door.

All the framed prints on the cottage walls were of Alpine scenes. Tim wandered around and looked at each one and then hunkered down in the chair again. He lit a new cigarette from the old one and started counting the roses in the painted trim that circled the room a foot from the floor. There were dark old books in the book case. The book case was rose colored with simulated knotholes. Tim didn't feel like reading. It was twelve midnight.

Someone tapped lightly on the door.

"Friend or gorilla?" he said, not moving.

"Tim," said a girl's voice. "You still up?"

Tim grinned and went to the door. "Carolyn?"

It was Carolyn. She had a coffee pot in one hand. "Like a cup of coffee?"

"I was thinking about it. Come in." She did and he closed the door.

"You have a kitchen here, you know," said Carolyn, walking toward a door with spiralling twining flowers painted all over it. "Right in there."

"Yeah," said Tim. "But all the pots have rosebuds on them and there're elves and gnomes all over the walls."

"Suspecting you might feel that way, I brought coffee in from the outside." She went into the kitchen. "All the coffee cups have Tyrolean landscapes on them," she called. "Is that going to bother you?"

"I'll put up with it," he said. "Where were you all day?"

"I have my own little office up on the second floor of the house."

"You didn't come to dinner."

"I don't eat with the family."

"Neither did I, as it turned out."

Carolyn brought in two cups of steaming coffee. "I heard Neshit dismissed another cook, huh?"

"Thanks," said Tim, taking a cup and nodding at a rattan chair. "Something I'm wondering, Carolyn."

She seated herself, straight with her knees tight together. "I know. What's a nice girl like me doing in a place like this?"

"Yes, that's it."

"I knew Neshit before," she said. "So?"

"He knows some things about me," Carolyn said. "They need a good secretary here. I'm one. That's all."

"Nesbit's forcing you to stay?"

"Sometime we'll talk about it. Not tonight, not now," she said.

Tim stayed standing. "They never mention that Nesbit is a gorilla," he said finally.

"He isn't to them anymore," said Carolyn. "Nesbit is the answer to too many of their problems. They have to see him differently."

"I still don't know why you stay."

"And what's keeping you here?"

"It's my job to get the jungle if I can," Tim said.

"That's everybody's favorite reason," the girl said. "I only work there."

"Tonight, right after Nesbit pitched an orange at me, I thought of walking out on this. Back in Hollywood, though, I'd have to tell Igoo something. A gorilla throwing ripe fruit at me. Maybe he won't listen."

"You like the job?"

Tim said, "I don't like people who tell you about their childhood the first time they meet you. Still, I'm considering doing it."

"This is the second or third time you've met me," said Carolyn. "Go ahead."

"Well, I had an uncle. On my mother's side. Uncle Norman," said Tim. He drank some coffee, paced. "He had a job in an ornamental iron shop until 1924 or 25 and then he quit. He was going to be a professional ball player. He was thirty-three and weighed two hundred pounds. For a ball player only five feet five inches tall that's a little too much weight."

"They could have nicknamed him Slim or something," said Carolyn. "Ballplayers go in for nicknames a lot."

"They didn't nickname him anything. He never made it and he kept drifting around. To drift for something like twenty-two years, that's an accomplishment. He died in 1958. He was living in San Francisco, in a hotel room in the tenderloin. My father paid for the funeral." Tim stopped behind Carolyn's chair.

"Your father probably always said something like, 'If you don't watch out you'll end up like your Uncle Norman.' Huh?"

"Sure. Everybody with an Uncle Norman has heard that. A hokey line like that. I know it's not a code to live by. 'Yes, boys and girls, I've always lived by this simple principle: Don't end up like your Uncle Norman.' Still, here I am doing PR for a gorilla."

Carolyn reached down and placed her coffee cup on a jigsaw table. She turned in her chair until she was kneeling in it facing him. "My principle is much simpler. You've got to watch out so the s.o.b.'s don't get you."

Tim's shoulders ached suddenly and he reached out and rested his hands on the girl's. "That's sound advice."

"It tops Uncle Norman."

He kissed her, letting go her hands, resting his palms flat on her back.

Eventually Carolyn said, "Coffee pot."

"What makes you say that? More advice?"

"The coffee pot's boiling over. I left it on the burner."

Tim listened. "So you did."

"I'll be right back," Carolyn said.

And she was.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Nine*

"As to the Negro," said Laura Belgraf, letting the rainbow sunlight that came through the stained glass window of her office fall across the lower half of her body.

"Which Negro?" asked Tim. Laura had placed him in a coarse-materialled morris chair and given

him a thick yellow legal tablet and six highly sharpened pencils.

The blonde girl stretched her arms up, made a yawning sound. She was wearing lemon yellow shorts and a pale blue jersey and the stretching brought her navel into view. "The Negro," Laura said. "I mean the Negro in general, McCarey."

He watched the navel until Laura lowered her arms and it disappeared. "Negroes in general?"

"Nesbit hasn't decided what to do with them when he takes over the country," she said. Sidestepping out of her sandals she slid barefoot across the rug to her roll top desk. "You know about his plan to solve unemployment once he's in control?"

"No, ma'm."

"He's going to put all the unemployed to work."

"Say," said Tim, "that'll do it, won't it?"

Laura frowned. "It's how Nesbit's going to do it that's the brilliant part, McCarey."

"Okay, bow?"

"He's going to put them to work building concentration camps."

Tim patted his pockets and found cigarettes. "Oh, so?"

Laura swiveled in her chair and spread her left hand fingers out. She ticked them off one by one,

saying, "The Jews, of course. You really can't have a concentration camp without them."

Tim lit a cigarette and didn't speak. He reminded himself that he was here to rent a jungle. Concentrate on the jungle and don't let what the Belgrafs say reach you.

"Then the Chinese," said Laura, touching another finger tip. They're all communists anyway and the commies are dupes for you know who. Then probably the Japs, though we might need them to keep gardens up and things like that." Laura smiled some. "The Russians, naturally. I guess that's it so far. The Negro we're not decided on."

"These you-know-who people," Tim said. "The 'they' Nesbit refers to. Who, exactly, are they?"

The girl shook her head. "That's classified, McCarey. The details are, I mean." Tapping the side of her head she said, "Nesbit carries a good deal of that top secret material in his mind. Don't worry. You don't need all the details in order to write stuff for us. Shall I get on about the Negro?"

Jungle, jungle, Tim thought. "Sure," he said.

"Well, Nesbit is torn between putting them in concentration camps or eliminating them," Laura

said. "See, none of the other inmates would want to be in the same concentration camp with Negroes. You can't blame them for that. Building separate but equal concentration camps may prove too costly."

Tim watched the smoke he'd exhaled. It rose straight in the still air. Carolyn had told him how to get upstairs to her office and he was hoping he could sneak up and see her sometime this morning.

Laura said sharply, "Take a few notes, McCarey."

"Yes, ma'm." He chose a pencil from the hatch fanned out on the table next to him. Held it up to her.

The girl turned and leaned forward, tugging at the roll top. Tim made a quick sketch of her spine. The desk opened and Laura said, "I'll give you copies of our most recent propaganda and then you can get a better idea of our general philosophy."

"Would Carolyn Loomis have any files I should see?" he asked.

"No." Laura stood, fists filled with small pamphlets of many colors. "That's right. It was Carolyn who set up your first meeting with me. You spent the night with her."

"Not exactly."

"I can imagine, with that one. Have you been seeing her?"

"We nod on the way to work."

"Surely again, McCarey," said Laura. She crossed and flipped the booklets and pamphlets into his lap. "If I think you should talk to Carolyn I'll tell you about it. Right now, remember, I'm in the process of growing fond of you."

"I know," said Tim. "I know."

"You still do want the jungle, don't you?" She snapped her fingers. "Oh, that reminds me." She slid her hand flat into the waist of her shorts and drew out a folded telegram. "From your boss. I'll read it to you. 'Sounds good, Tim. Be positive and enthusiastic and you'll win out. Know you can. Counting on you, buddy. (signed) Igooe.' " She tucked the refolded wire away. "Be enthusiastic, McCarey, and you'll get just what you want."

Tim gathered the booklets and pamphlets together and slapped them inside the notebook. "Fine."

Laura swung down and rested her palms on the arms of his chair. "I really do like the shape of your head, McCarey. You must have a wonderful skull."

"Well, I have gotten rather fond of it myself."

Laura sighed. "Damn. I have to

go confer with Uncle Vincent now. I'll be getting back with you this afternoon, McCarey." She kissed him on the forehead. "Yes. I'm very fond of you."

After she'd gone out the side door between the book cases Tim rose up quietly. He moved to the bead screened doorway to the hall and listened. If it looked clear he'd try to get upstairs and see Carolyn.

One step into the hall and a paw grabbed him.

"Just who I'm looking for," said Nesbit. "Come along."

Tim went along.

Abruptly the path became paved with flagstones. The jungle thinned and the sounds of marching grew louder.

Nesbit loped ahead of Tim and stopped at a rise. He swept his silver-visored cap off and beckoned to Tim with it. "Come and look. You're here during a splendid week."

Tim stopped at the gorilla's side and looked down. In a clearing below were, at the farthest edge, a half dozen two story army style barracks, plus three quonset huts and a recreation hall. On a parade ground some sixty men in green and silver were being drilled by a man who seemed to be Colonel Granger. Nearer to Tim and Nes-

bit, some fifty yards away, was a half built review stand. "Going to be a parade?" Tim asked the gorilla.

"Exactly," said Nesbit, with a deep chuckle. "Day after tomorrow. I've arranged it for you to be seated right on the reviewing stand with the officials and dignitaries."

"Will there be guests coming in?"

Nesbit put his highpeaked cap back on. "A few sympathetic political figures from the surrounding areas, yes."

"How many troops do you have here in all?"

The gorilla's head turned. "Exact figures are classified. I'll tell you what sort of numbers to use in our publicity." Nesbit grimaced. "How's the campaign coming?"

"Right along," said Tim.

"Good. We'll have a big conference tomorrow." The gorilla's lips puckered and he rolled his eyes. "Do you think we can run off a pamphlet in time for the parade?"

"If your printer will cooperate."

"Rasmussen will cooperate."

"I was wondering," said Tim, watching the troops do a to-the-rear march. "Would it be okay for me to check things out with your secretary? It might speed the

work up in case I can't locate something."

"With Carolyn, you mean?"

"Yes."

"No," said the gorilla. "There's a great load of correspondence. Carolyn has to devote all her time to that. You've met my secretary, have you?"

"When I first got here."

"Carolyn's too busy for much social conversation," said Nesbit. "She's a very complex girl, Carolyn is. I've known her a long time."

And you've got something on her, you shaggy bastard, Tim thought. "I see," he said.

"I wanted you to see the work in progress," said Nesbit, extending one paw, palm up, toward the uncompleted stand. "That's going to be an inspiring place to watch a parade from, isn't it?"

"It is."

"Good," said the gorilla. "I have to join my men now. Can you get on back to the house on your own?"

"No trouble," said Tim.

Nesbit held out his right paw. "Damn glad you're aboard." He shook hands and clicked his heels. Then he pivoted and galloped down hill toward the marching troops.

Tim turned away. Despite the

gorilla's polite warning Tim wanted to look in on Carolyn.

Near the big Victorian house a voice called him. "Come into my office for a moment and take a look at some charts and graphs." It was old Vincent Belgraf, waving from his study window.

"Belgrafs, Belgrafs everywhere," Tim said to himself, returning the wave.

. . .

### Chapter Ten

The dusty grandfather clock made a gear shifting sound and chimed once. Vincent Belgraf cocked his head, pronging his silver watch out of its pocket and studying it. "What say to some lunch?" he asked Tim.

Tim blinked and sat up. He was half buried in blueprints and charts. He said, "Yes, if we're finished here." He stood slowly, the charts falling away from him and rustling like giant dead leaves.

"No, no," said Belgraf. "Nevertheless we have to keep ourselves in good condition. We'll break, therefore, for lunch." He rested a thumb against Tim's shoulder. "You won't mind pot luck in the kitchen? We're in transition between cooks, you know."

"Sure, that's okay."

Moving down the brown hallway Belgraf said, "Listen to this." He stopped and jumped in the air, landing flatfooted. "This house is over eighty years old. Yet it's still sturdy and solid. They built them to last in Sanford Belgraf's day. Ever wonder why houses aren't built like this in our so-called modern times?"

"No," said Tim. He was still trying to shake off the drowsiness that his hours with Belgraf had brought on.

"They didn't have income taxes then." He bit his thin dry lower lip. "That's the reason." He tried another leap. "Not a creak. This house is solid." He massaged his ribs. "It unsettles me a little, though."

Tim rested back against a dark-wood wall, to watch in case Belgraf did anymore jumping. "Sanford Belgraf," he said. "He was in the railroad business, wasn't he?"

"They called him the Jack Harkaway of railroading," said Belgraf. "Jack Harkaway was a famous old English highwayman. Yes, Sanford Belgraf was one of California's favorite robber barons. People love tycoons, you know. Despite what today's crybaby government says." The old man exhaled sadly and moved on. "Ah, the glory that was the Nineteenth Century."

Laura was already in the long cool, pale blue kitchen. The kitchen was bright and new with everything built into the walls. Laura was still wearing the lemon-colored shorts but she'd gotten rid of the jersey and was wearing a terrycloth halter. "I started without you two," she said. "Thought you'd be holed up all afternoon with man-stuff to talk about." She was hunched on a chrome and blue leather kitchen stool, eating a sandwich.

Old Vincent Belgraf smiled at his niece. "I believe I'll have some of my canned figs," he said. He shuffled to a door with the word **PANTRY** lettered on it in illuminated script. He opened the door and then his steps sounded on wooden stairs.

"Pantry's way down under the house," said Laura. "What would you like for lunch?"

"Sandwich will be okay," Tim said, noticing a plate of them on the kitchen table.

"Take one. It's tuna and mustard, Which I like. Is that okay with you, McCarey?"

He took a sandwich. "Sure."

Laura straightened and stretched her legs out in front of her. "Would you believe it, McCarey?"

"Believe what?"

"In the few hours since I last

saw you I've grown even fonder of you." She finished her sandwich and touched her fingertips to her lips.

Down in the pantry there was a scuffling and tottering and a muffled crash. "What the hell?" Tim moved to the pantry door.

"It's just Uncle Vincent falling off his ladder," Laura said. "Come back here, McCarey."

"I'll go help him."

"No, no," said Laura. "He's always falling off things. Helping him up only wounds his pride. The Belgrafs are a proud fierce race, McCarey. It will take him a few minutes to right himself. Come here."

Tim's thumb was sinking into the bread of the tuna sandwich. He went back toward the girl.

"You seem reluctant to spend time near me, McCarey." Laura crossed her legs and reached one hand out to him. "I thought you might like to kiss me until Uncle Vincent reappears."

"Wait till I set down my sandwich." He dropped the thing back on the plate and stood watching the girl.

Laura smiled, her tongue flicking at her upper lip. "Well, McCarey?"

"I guess I'm not used to spending my lunch hours this way."



"I thought in Hollywood that's all they did at noon."

"I only get an hour for lunch."

"I should think that would be more than enough time."

"Well," said Tim, "by the time the girl gets her whip and boots and I get into my lion suit a good lot of time has gone by. Everybody in Hollywood has some kind of offbeat sex schtick, you know."

Laura dropped to the floor. "Okay, McCarey. Kid me if you want to. I see your trouble. You're hung up with that hooker."

"What hooker?"

"Carolyn Loomis, who else?"

Tim swallowed. "Come on, Laura now. That's not the case at all. It's just that I don't like to think of Uncle Vincent popping back in. There's going to be plenty of time." Keep thinking about the jungle, he told himself. And try to get Carolyn off the hook, too. "Okay, Laura?"

Laura caught his hands and put them on her bare waist. "We'll see, McCarey." She rested herself against him for a moment. "You're very strange sometimes, McCarey." She shrugged back and went around him and out of the kitchen. From the hallway she called, "We'll see how things go under different conditions."

Belgraf came slowly up the

stairs and wavered into the kitchen. "I'd do anything for these figs," he said. "Eat something now. Then it's back to work we go."

Tim picked up the sandwich again.

In the darkness outside Tim's cottage grasshoppers were mating. Mating with owls, from the sound of it. Tim ground out his cigarette in a cupid's bottom ashtray and scowled at the half finished sandwich in the plate on his knee. He'd made this one himself.

It was after seven and he still hadn't seen Carolyn. All afternoon he'd rotated from Belgraf to Belgraf, gathering bundles of propaganda, rolls of charts, folders of clippings. Out of it all he was supposed to invent a unified campaign, an umbrella as Laura called it, to sell Nesbit to the country. And Tim still didn't have any idea who they were, though Nesbit referred to them more than frequently.

Fortunately for the Belgrafs, Carolyn was in this business now. It was added incentive for Tim to stay, since he was becoming more and more leery of his getting to sign up part of the jungle for Igoo-Glackens. Southern California had some kookie groups all right, but it looked as though Nesbit and his

plans for world domination took the prize.

He'd tried calling Carolyn at the house, but Vincent Belgraf had answered and read off the names of all the Supreme Court judges who were dupes.

In Tim's room, every hour two stunted Tyroleans popped out of the wall clock and yodeled the hour. It didn't add to the waiting. Finally, he stood up, dumped all the Nesbit material and part of a sandwich onto his chair, then went to the bookcase and read a few titles out loud. "*A Teacher Of The Violin* by J. H. Shorthouse, *Too Strange Not To Be True* by Lady Lady Georgianna Fullerton, *Twist Love And Duty* by Tighe Hopkins, *Three Weeks In Belgium* by An Irishman." When he opened one of the brittle old books a preserved daisy fell out and smashed on the floor.

Back by his chair Tim looked down at the disorder of propaganda. Nesbit felt that the UN was a dupe group and that the building itself was really a super missile ready to be fired by them. Comic books were drawn exclusively by Jewish homosexuals who were posing as communists until Take-Over Day. The PTA had been infiltrated by female impersonators and on Take-Over Day they would reveal

themselves. Fluoridated water was bad not only in itself but because eighty-four percent of all plumbers were dupes. The only way to stop Take-Over Day was to put aside old-fashioned ideas. Dump democracy and tie the can to the republic. Put Nesbit in charge.

A faint knock on the door.

Tim grinned. He sprinted the few feet to the door and yanked it open to let in Carolyn.

"I don't know if you remember me or not but I'd like to talk to you." It was Sheldon E. Stone, the recruit Tim had given a lift to.

"Sure, Sheldon. What is it?"

The pale young man licked his lips. "May I come in?"

"I'm expecting someone."

"Not Nesbit?"

"No," said Tim. "Okay, come in for a minute."

Once inside the cottage Sheldon said, "Oh, Mr. McCarey, I may have made a mistake." He had on green and silver fatigues. His left eye was yellow around the edges.

"Nesbit hit you?"

"Yes, for not knowing my manual of arms," said the recruit. He noticed the half sandwich. "Have you any further use for that?"

"No, didn't you eat tonight?"

"I'm supposed to be in the stockade," said Sheldon, grabbing the sandwich. "A friend let me out to

slip over here. Food, though, he couldn't get any of."

"You're disappointed with the set up?" Tim asked, starting for the kitchen. "Cup of coffee?"

"If I might," said Sheldon. "Yes, I'm bitterly and terribly disheartened."

Tim reached into the kitchen and spun on the gas burner under the coffee pot. "How so?"

"Mr. McCarey, I'm an idealist." He shook his head. "I was so certain that a man with Nesbit Belgraf's beliefs would be the nearest thing to a saint this jaded old century could offer."

Pointing at the pamphlets, Tim asked, "You've read that stuff?"

"Of course. Over and over. The thinking is beautiful. So logical. Providing an answer for every problem. Even acne," said Sheldon. "However, the man himself."

Tim narrowed one eye. "You weren't expecting a groilla perhaps?"

"I knew he had been, well, disfigured as the result of an accident," said Sheldon, finishing the sandwich. "Frankly, Mr. McCarey, I find his present appearance rather virile and heroic. It's simply that he's so mean and disagreeable."

Tim poured a cup of coffee and handed it to him. "What do you plan on doing?"

"I heard scuttlebutt to the effect that you were staying on for a few days," said Sheldon. He clutched the cup in both hands. "I was hoping that when you left you might conceal me in your car. If you leave."

"If?"

"I'm hoping you'll be allowed to leave," said Sheldon. "After all, the Belgrafs supposedly like you. Still, they also like Dr. Jackstone and he can never set foot beyond these walls."

"Well, if I make it through the walls you can come along. Okay?"

"I'll have my friend contact you. I may be in the stockade for quite some time." Sheldon gulped all of the hot coffee down. "Now I must slip away."

"Take it easy," said Tim, opening the door.

"Bless you." Sheldon ducked out into the night.

"Hello," said a voice.

Tim squinted. "At last."

Carolyn, in a skirt and blouse, with a tan short coat hooked on her forefinger and hanging over her shoulder, was standing a few feet away. "I understand you're having one of your famous at-home evenings. Are visitors welcome?"

"Come in and browse," he said, reaching out to her.

She came in.

Carolyn steadied his hand with hers while he lit her cigarette. "What did you learn today?" she asked Tim.

He dumped all the Nesbit propaganda on the floor to make room so she could sit in the chair. He poked the stuff with his foot. "Is his mail and correspondence in the same vein?"

"Yes," the girl said. She rested the fingers of one slender hand against her cheek and it heightened the sharp line of her cheekbone. "Though some of the letters that come in aren't as articulate as that."

"You don't," began Tim—

"Share Nesbit's point of view?" She grinned. "Do you suspect that I do?"

"No," said Tim. "But, damn it, I wish you'd tell me."

"Tell you what? My political outlook."

"No. What it is that Nesbit knows about you. Why he can hold you here."

Carolyn shook her head. "I can tell you about a dream I had when I finally got home last night."

"Carolyn," he said.

"In the dream I was traveling across the Midwest with an educated bear. We both had bicycles and one of them was named Kafka. It was the bear's bike that had a name and I remember I felt very

envious. That's what I dreamt."

Tim turned away. "Okay, fine."

"Aren't things unsettling enough already without trying to unearth my screwed-up past?"

He faced her again.

Carolyn's head swung once from side to side. "I'm sorry, Tim. But let's drop it."

He said, "Somebody stocked my icebox with Tuborg Beer. Want one?"

"Yes, please," said Carolyn. Her eyes had narrowed, her mouth grew thin and small. Then suddenly she smiled, laughed. "It's mean old world. I really like you, Tim. I'm sorry I seem such a screwball."

Tim went in and dug out two bottles of beer. "They put eight tins of Plumrose deviled ham in here and two loaves of rye bread. Want a sandwich?"

"No," said Carolyn. She had risen and come into the kitchen to watch him.

Tim found a bottle opener and reached for the first frosted bottle. He looked at the girl. "Wait a second."

"What?"

He moved to her, kissed her. "First things first."

Carolyn smiled. "This is really some setting for an office romance, isn't it?"

"Now, now, Miss Loomis, you're more than just a typist to me. I assure you, my dear young lady."

"You'll get the jungle and sneak off without leaving so much as a forwarding address."

"Hey," Tim said.

"Yes?"

"Let's not kid for a minute. Okay?"

Carolyn widened her eyes. "Okay."

"No, really."

The phone rang.

It kept ringing.

"I'll answer it," said Tim.

"Be serious with them."

Tim ran in and jerked up the receiver. "Hello?"

"Put Carolyn on the line, McCarey."

"Who, ma'am?"

Laura's voice was low and even. "Carolyn Loomis. Don't stall around, McCarey. I know she's with you. Tell her if she values her job she had better get up here now, Nesbit has some urgent dictation."

"Fine."

"And it may take all night, McCarey," said Laura and cut off.

"They want me?" asked Carolyn.

"Yeah. That was Laura. They want you back at the house."

"Swell," she said, gathering up her coat.

"I can call in and say you've broken something."

"Laura knew I was here, huh?"

"She did."

"I'll go," Carolyn said. She took his hand for a second and then left.

Tim kicked the propaganda s" over the cottage. It took him a half hour to gather it together again.

\* \* \*

## Chapter Eleven

A dry hot wind blew all the next day. It scattered leaves, fronds and dust. It whacked bamboo stalks together and toppled cockatoos off trees.

The birds kept banging, squawking, against the leaded panes of the parlor in the big house where Tim was pretending to be putting together a new improved Nesbit campaign. Whenever Tim looked up from his desk, which was often, he saw a solid wall of oval framed Civil War Generals. Actually there was one World War I aviator in among the whiskered generals. A slim young guy with leather helmet and flapping neck scarf, smiling and waving alongside a black triplane.

He had tried to spend some time with Carolyn but the Belgrafs kept waylaying him. He passed her in the hallway once but old Vincent

Belgraf had him by the arm that time. Carolyn looked fresh and bright, except her guarded smile turned into a yawn.

Late in the afternoon the sky blurred and the wind died. Night came on at once and a heavy, hard hitting rain began to fall. Tim rocked back once in his chair and put the eraser end of a pencil in his ear.

"Tim," said a soft voice. A hand touched his shoulder.

He got the pencil free and turned "Ma'am?"

It was Laura. She was wearing a pair of black levis and grey striped shirt. She had two butterfly-sized black bows in her hair. "I'm sorry if I was rather salty to you last evening." She put the tip of her forefinger where the eraser had been, rotating it clockwise.

Tilting his head and freeing his ear, Tim stood up. The rain throbbed against the window. "Is Carolyn going to have to work to-night, too?"

Laura's face tightened slightly. "That's really up to Nesbit. He and Uncle Vincent are caught up in the preparations for the parade and the attendant ceremonies." She flattened the fingers of one hand across her stomach. "I came to suggest that you have dinner with me. I haven't had a reason to do some

real gourmet cooking in a long while.

"Well," said Tim.

"You can be sure Carolyn will be busy till long after dinner."

Laura eased her hand across her stomach so that her upright thumb brushed the bottom of her breasts. "I'm very good at lobster bisque." Her hands interlocked and she moved closer to Tim, her sneakered feet sliding on the rug. "Or mulligatawny."

"I was never quite sure what's in mulligatawny soup," said Tim, leaning back against the rain-wracked window.

"Chicken, veal bouillon, carrots," said Laura, transferring her hands from her stomach to his. "Onions, cloves, leek, celery, mushrooms, mace, cardamon, cinnamon, butter." The tips of her breasts touched his chest. "Cornstarch, curry and heavy cream."

"No kidding."

"It's a meal in itself."

"For the entree I'm thinking of sweetthreads a la Lyonnaise," said the girl. She caught his ears in her hands and pulled his head down kissing him.

"Though sometimes I just pick up something frozen at the supermarket," Tim said.

A sopping mackaw slammed against the glass.

"Well, damn it," said Laura, kissing him again.

Tim felt like a kaleidoscope. He was being slowly rotated and his emotions kept forming new patterns. Ideologically Laura wasn't too attractive. She wasn't really even affable. But there was that simple basic attraction and somehow Tim felt his masculinity challenged. He wanted to follow through just to prove something to the girl. He grimaced and tried to let his loyalty to Carolyn take over. Things were getting complex and the rain and the close room and the falling birds weren't helping his concentration. Nor was the fact that Laura was unbuttoning his chamoray shirt.

"Where are my maps of the Greater Los Angeles freeway system?" called Nesbit outside the door.

Like a motion picture running down Laura undid one final button, the one nearest the belt buckle and then, gritting her teeth, she stepped back. She gave a wet cat shake and said, "I'll get in touch with you later."

After she left the room Tim shoved all the papers on his desk into a scuffed briefcase Laura had given him. Stuffing the thing under his coat he left the house. He

made himself stroll back to his cottage. The rain didn't help any.

Fortunately the time between this encounter with Laura and the morning of the parade was filled with confusions and distractions and Tim's feelings weren't put to the test again. He spent little time alone with Laura. He saw hardly anything of Carolyn.

Early on the day of the review he was awakened by a couple of privates and told to report to Laura at the parade ground.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Twelve*

The swayback horse was eating the bunting on the left side of the review stand. At the edge of the parade ground Laura Belgraf hunched down in her lynx coat and said to Tim, "I wish that horse would lay off the decorations."

The morning was cold, streaked with mist. Tim kept his hands in his pockets. "Why don't you ask the old guy riding the horse to knock it off?"

"You don't just do that with Jack Moog."

Tim stared at the brittle lanky old man on the ancient horse. He had a lock of dead white hair hanging across his forehead. The big high-crowned stetson was splotted

and there was a patch on the sleeve of the checkerboard shirt. But now Tim recognized the old cowboy. "That's Jack Moog? I thought he vanished with the talkies."

"No. He had the right kind of investments and the Crash never touched him. He's one of Nesbit's most ardent supporters and backers. He comes to all our rallies and parades."

"Can you be ardent at 85?"

"He's barely 80," said Laura, shaking her head as the horse swallowed the last of a poster. "That's Fred, the Wonder Horse. It's sort of sad about how they eased Moog out of pictures."

"Something about his voice, wasn't it?"

"Not his," said Laura. "The horse's. Fred had an effeminate whinny and it spoiled the whole image. I never saw *The Deputy Sheriff of Devil's Doorknob* or *Ride, Fred, Ride* or *The Coconino Kid Drives Aces* but I'm told by movie buffs that they weren't strong at the box office."

"If that's Fred, the Wonder Horse, from silent movies he must be forty years old," said Tim. "That's pretty old for a horse."

Jack Moog had spotted Laura. He rested one sharp old elbow on his saddle horn and spun his big white hat in the air. Tim remem-

bered from a Wolper documentary that this was the way Jack Moog opened all his silent westerns. The horse took three tentative steps in their direction and then toppled over.

"Darn," said Laura.

"The horse must be dead," said Tim.

"No, he's napping. Right on the parade ground. I hope it doesn't anger Nesbit."

"Wahoo, wahoo," called Jack giving his hat another spin.

Sucking her cheek, Laura gestured to some of the soldiers who were loitering around the review stand. They hustled over to drag the horse into the underbrush. Moog supervised and then gave one of his famous running jumps and landed up on the review stand. He'd gone over the stand rail the same way he used to leap over saloon bars to get at the tinhorns. If he hadn't landed spreadeagled between two folding chairs it would have been a perfect moment of recaptured past.

"Yucky, yucky, yucky," said someone behind Tim. He turned and saw a trio of middle aged people. A round cherubic man with his hair worn Sandburg style and a round cherubic woman in a fur-trimmed cloth coat. Her hair was white, tinged with light blue. With



this couple was a soft handsome man with a beautiful blond hair-piece and grinning false teeth.

"Yucky, yucky, yucky," said the woman again.

"Mr. and Mrs. Friesen," said Laura. "You're early."

"We always are," said Mr. Friesen. "First ones here."

"Except for Jack Moog. The parade won't start for an hour," said Laura. "Though you're welcome to go up on the stand."

Mrs. Friesen smiled at Tim. "We don't know you. Yucky, yucky, yucky."

"I'm Tim McCarey. And you folks are the famous Friesens who have all those carton shows on TV." Fortunately a rival talent agency handled Win Friesen's publicity.

"Sure we are," said Mr. Friesen, shaking hands. "And right here with us is Bryan Spoiner himself."

"Ob?" said Tim.

"My radio show is heard on 428 radio stations across the land and I have supporters in the halls of government and the shadow of the pulpit, in the penthouse and in the marketplace," said Spoiner. His voice was deep and well-thought out.

"Yeah," said Tim, remembering. "You do something called *Alarm*—"

"The Paul Revere of radio," said

Mrs. Friesen. "Yucky, yucky, yucky."

"I'm trying," said Tim, "to place that catch phrase, Mrs. Friesen."

"Mommy is the voice of our best-known cartoon character," said Mr. Friesen. He waited for Tim to supply the name, then finally said "Alex Ant. Tuesday nights at 8."

Tim snapped his fingers. "Sure, I should have got it at once."

"Yucky, yucky, yucky," said Mrs. Friesen. "That's what Alex Ant says."

"Mommy is Benny Bird, too."

"Twee-tle twee," said Mrs. Friesen.

"And Doctor Dog."

"Bow wow, how wow."

"I'll escort you to your seats," said Laura, getting both the Friesens by an elbow.

"A dedicated couple," said Spoiner. "They earned \$26,000,000 last year." He shook hands and headed for the review stand.

Tim put his hands back in his pockets and watched the fog thinning away over the parade ground. "Arf," he said.

Nesbit arrived about a half hour later. His green and silver uniform seemed brand new. He had a splendid gold lined cape over his shoulders and his helmet was gold plated.

Tim was in a folding chair toward the back of the stand. He had looked over his shoulder for Carolyn so often that his neck was stiff. The girl hadn't showed up.

"Tell them to drag it farther away," Nesbit was saying to Laura. Moog's horse was still asleep and it had moved some out of the jungle as it tossed and snorted.

Two dozen people were on the stand now. There was even the acting mayor of a small beach town. Among the other visitors were Handy "Call Me Cousin" Hotch, who ran a religious radio crusade out of Tijuana, Mexico. When he'd introduced himself to Tim he'd given him a free transistor radio with decal pictures of the 12 apostles on it. Tim counted and could find only nine of them. Sitting next to him was Sonny Boy Baylight, the former child star. He told Tim he had created a special tap dance in honor of Nesbit. Sonny Boy was about forty, still curly headed and freckled. He was a greeter in a Hawaiian Delicatessen in Orange County, his movie career long behind him.

The parade itself began smoothly, only four minutes behind schedule. First on the field was Nesbit's marching band. It had twenty-some members and for some reason half of them played French horns,

but the march tune, which Sonny Boy Baylight whispered he'd contributed some notes to, sounded not too bad. As the band marched around, a float rolled out of the jungle. This consisted of a heroic-sized representation of Nesbit himself with one paw shielding his eyes, looking vigilantly to the future, and his other on a large cannon. It was all modeled out of California poppies and red carnations. Jack Moog's horse woke up when the band passed him. He raised his head and gave a high pitched neigh, then galloped for the float. The jeep that was pulling the thing swerved. Tim saw now that the jeep driver was Sheldon E. Stone. Everybody had been sprung from the stockade to participate in the festivities.

Sheldon was watching Fred, the Wonder Horse, and this caused him to drive straight into the first wave of marching infantry. Two privates cartwheeled upward as Sheldon hit the brakes. The float accorndianed into the jeep and Jack Moog's horse attacked it.

"Yucky, yucky, yucky," said Mrs. Friesen, dismayed.

Nesbit rose up. Laura caught at his arm. He roared and ripped off his cape. Laura got tangled in it. Nesbit was on the rail now. He jerked off his boots and threw

them and his helmet at the confusion of troops and flowers. "Spoiled, spoiled," he shouted.

Nesbit went through the musicians first. The air was filled with French horns and plumed hats. The audience had fallen silent and you could hear bones breaking. Nesbit paused half way into the band and chucked his uniform. He was bellowing now. "Spoiled it all, spoiled it all."

He got Sheldon at last. The pale young man had tried to climb up onto the flower cannon for protection. Nesbit leaped up on the ruined float and gripped Sheldon's shoulders. He flapped him in the air like a dusty rug and then sent him whirling out over the parade ground. Sheldon made a loud oofing sound when he hit and then didn't move.

"You, too," said Nesbit. Fred the horse was nibbling poppies off the figure of Nesbit. The gorilla roared again and jumped on the horse's back.

Jack Moog leaped to his feet and reached for his gun belt. He wasn't wearing it and he cursed and jumped over the rail.

Fred gave an effeminate whinny and began to gallop in tight circles. Nesbit was pummeling the horse. Fred stopped still and started to

buck. Nesbit and the saddle shot free.

"Hold off, mister," shouted Moog as Nesbit lunged again at the bucking Fred.

Nesbit spun, waved both hairy arms. He wasn't using words anymore.

"I ain't got much use for a man who mistreats a horse," said the cowboy.

Nesbit hesitated.

"You're getting too ornery," said Moog. "I reckon I'd best stop payment on that last check I contributed."

The gorilla fisted his paws and brought them up in front of his muzzle. Then he growled and ran off, bounding across the parade grounds and into the jungle.

"My god," said Laura, "he'll never come back."

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Thirteen*

"Over here," called Laura. She was pacing the low diving board at the end of the glass enclosed room.

The pool was official size, its water rocking gently, a pale silver blue. The roof was made up of hundreds of panels of green tinted glass. The glass and the thick border of palms, ferns and large-pet-

aled flowers around the water gave the place a hothouse look and smell.

"Nesbit back yet?" Tim asked, walking carefully on the mosaic tile flooring.

Laura had her hair tied back and was wearing a short candy striped robe. Flicking a cigarette butt into the water she said, "No." She swayed at the very edge of the board. "That's not unusual, really. He was quite upset by the fiasco of the parade review. It's likely he simply wants to be alone to think."

"Uh huh," said Tim. He sat on the foot rest of a white wicker lounge chair. "Why'd you send for me? Do you have some more work you'd like me to handle?"

Wind rattled the glass panes and the shadows of large leaves hit the glass roof. "Swimming helps me unwind, Tim. I hoped you'd join me. If you want trunks there's a bath house back in the hall there." She pointed at a black alcove.

"Suppose Nesbit doesn't come back?"

Laura wound her hands around the cord of her robe and pulled it tighter. "I told you he was very temperamental. Don't get the idea he's going to stay out in the jungle running wild forever."

"Isn't that what you're afraid of?"

Laura undid the cord and the

robe swung open. "I'm beginning to think that the mess on the parade ground wasn't entirely an accident."

Tim watched her moonlit stomach. "You think Moog's horse was a dupe?"

Laura slipped out of the robe, hounced once on the board and knifed into the water.

A cockatoo walked across the roof.

Laura surfaced at the other end of the pool, tossing her head and sputtering. She vanished again and in a moment was climbing out, up the brass ladder. "Are you wondering who I suspect of sabotaging the ceremonies?"

"No," said Tim. "I'm wondering why you aren't wearing a swim suit."

"Don't people swim like this in Hollywood."

"Not in my income bracket. I'm two pay hikes from skinnydipping."

Laura hugged her slick stomach and sucked her cheek. She walked by Tim and moved, very straight, onto the board. She bent and retrieved the robe, which was hanging with its arms almost in the shimmering water. Tossing her head again she said, "I've almost got you figured out, McCarey."

Metal groaned. Tim glanced up and saw a giant shaggy cross on the

glass. "Nesbit's watching," he said.

"He is back," said Laura, hurrying into the robe. She tied it with a lopsided bow. Cupping her hands she called, "Nesbit. Nesbit, meet me in my room. I'll be there in a minute."

The gorilla hesitated then snaked slowly across the roof and was gone. "Think he'll meet you?"

Laura ran back onto the tiles. "Yes, he's back to stay now. Whenever he comes looking for me I know he's back to stay. He can get right into my bedroom window from the roof here. I'll see you tomorrow, Tim." She ran into the dark alcove.

A square of glass topled from the ceiling and immelmaned down to the water. It balanced on the surface for an instant and then sank.

On his way back to the cottage Tim stopped to watch a marmoset. The small woolly monkey was sitting on a black wrought iron chair. It gave Tim a sad grin, revealing that most of its teeth were gone.

"He's quite old."

Tim turned and Carolyn caught up with him. "Not as old as Moog's horse?" Tim said, taking the girl's hand.

"I heard about all that." She smiled.

"How come they didn't let you come to the parade?"

"Laura seemed to think there was lots of work to get out of the way. They just turned me loose now."

"Nesbit finally came back," said Tim. "Want to leave with me. Right now?"

"I told you I can't."

When they reached the door of her cottage Tim said, "Tell me why."

"Questions, questions," Carolyn said.

"Sorry."

She pushed into the cottage. "Tim."

He stepped into the dark room. "Yeah?"

Pressing close against him, holding him, she said, "Oh, Tim!" She cried, then finally said, "This is one of those nights when I get frightened."

"I'll stay."

Carolyn laughed. "I was hoping you would."

\* \* \*

Her knees were drawn up, warm against his side. Her hands were cupped on his shoulders. "We were about to be married," Carolyn was saying in a husky early morning voice. "It was a cathedral, sort of, except much smaller and covered with vines and hollyhocks. I remember a gargoyle all tangled in honeysuckle." He felt her smile

against his ear. "It really is handy being able to tell you these dreams almost as they happen."

His eyes were still partly closed. "Get to the wedding gifts. What did we amass?" The day outside the girl's cottage was a pale cold white.

"In the middle of the wedding the San Francisco earthquake of 1906 happened. I thought it was a lousy time for that. Being 1964 and in Santa Monica. All my dreams lately have been set in Santa Monica. Sometimes they even start with the words superimposed over the scene. Santa Monica it'll say.

"Now," said Tim, "if dreams go by opposites." He opened his eyes. "We have to figure out what's the opposite of Santa Monica."

"Almost anything."

Out among the birdcalls and animal cries there was the jungle of spurs. And booted feet. Tim swung out of bed. "Troops coming this way."

Carolyn stretched and shrugged. "They're probably practicing for the next parade."

A fist pounded on the outside door of Carolyn's cottage. "Are you awake, Miss Loomis?" called one of Nesbit's soldiers.

Carolyn looked at Tim. "Am I?"

"Better check out what they want." He dressed fast, fireman fashion.

"Yes," said Carolyn, searching the bedroom for a robe. She raised her voice. "Yes, I'm awake. It's nice of you to ask."

"We've come to arrest you."

Carolyn was half into a lace-trimmed robe. "Too fancy for getting arrested in." From a closet she reached down a faded terrycloth kimono. "What for?" she said to the door of the next room.

Treason, Miss Loomis. Better hurry up now."

"Let's not stall any more," said another, angrier voice.

"Even if it is treason, Jay, we still have to be polite."

A harsher pounding started on the door. "Come on out. Now."

"Damn it," said Tim. He moved to the bedroom door. "I'll stop them."

"No," said Carolyn. "This is probably just some prank of Laura's. Stay in here."

"And hide under the bed?"

"It's all hat boxes under there," she said. "Please, relax."

S o m e b o d y began kicking the front door in.

"Coming," said Carolyn. She ran from the bedroom, closing the door between her and Tim.

He hesitated against it, listening.

"I have to read this to you, Miss Loomis."

"Well, okay."

"I bet you deliberately opened the door while my foot was stuck through it," said the angry soldier.

"Stop hopping around, Jay, so I can read."

"Let's just drag her off. The hell with formality."

"You should really get your foot loose first," said Carolyn.

"Shut up," said Jay. Wood splintered. "There goes my best boot."

"To whom it may concern," began the other soldier.

"That's me, I guess," said Carolyn.

"You keep interrupting and I'll knock you down," said Jay.

Tim tightened his hand over the bedroom door knob.

"To whom it may concern," repeated the first soldier. "It is hereby and henceforth declared, taking into consideration due process of civil procedures, that the following person, Carolyn Ann Loomis, is to be taken into custody at once. The charges against said Carolyn Ann Loomis being treason in the form of deliberate sabotage against an important parade and its attendant ceremonies."

Tim hadn't known Carolyn's middle name until now.

"That's silly," said Carolyn. "Tell Laura I'll be up for work after I have some breakfast."

"This is serious, Miss Loomis."

"I warned you," cried Jay. There was the sound of a harsh slap.

Tim yanked the door open and ran for Carolyn. Jay, a wide close-cropped blond young man, hit her across the face again, then ducked and bent her over his shoulder.

"Hey" said Tim. His voice was low and calm, not at all his. "Hey, you son of a bitch." He made a dive for Jay. On the cottage doorstep, just into the warming morning air, a rifle butt slammed into Tim's face. Once in his chin and again, as he tottered, against the side of his head.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Fourteen*

Several mackaws were picketing him. Tim lifted his head and they scattered. "Yang," he said.

From across the way a voice said, "Feeling better?"

Tim felt his face. There was dried blood on the left side, a swelling on the right. "I suppose, Dr. Jackstone. Have you examined me while I was knocked out?"

"Haven't had a chance, Tim," said the plump doctor. He was hefting a large packing case through the doorway of his cottage. "You were not dead or seriously hurt. I knew that from the way you were

sprawled." He dropped the case inside.

"Aren't you eager for patients anymore?" Tim rolled over from his stomach to his back.

"The hassle yesterday was a bonanza. Besides," said Dr. Jackstone, gesturing at the five large cardboard cartons reigning his doorway, "I've got all this to uncrate. As a matter of fact, I may have ruptured myself lifting that last one. That would be interesting."

"How many were injured yesterday?" Tim dug in with his elbows and managed to sit up, his stomach whirring.

"A good half dozen." Jackstone trotted over to Tim. "I dashed over here from the infirmary to get these samples out of the way."

"Samples?" Tim masked his eyes for a moment, taking deep breaths.

"Brought in yesterday. One of Nesbit's supporters is in the wholesale drug line. Now and then I get a wonderful array of new drugs." He studied Tim a moment. "Any history of malaria in your family?"

"No," said Tim. "Why?"

"A shame," said the doctor. He scratched his crinkly white hair. "Being in the jungle like this. I keep hoping for a malaria case. Breaks my heart to think that I now have a whole gross of candy-

flavored malaria pills and no one to use them on."

"You could talk a mosquito into biting you."

"They shun me, the rascals." Dr. Jackstone tugged Tim to his feet. He gasped, then chuckled. "Yes, I think I do have a nice rupture coming alone."

"Congratulations." Tim blinked. "Do you know where they took Carolyn?"

"To the big house I imagine. I was in my office unpacking syringes when the troops carried her off." He shook his head. "Don't be discouraged. Many romances have impediments strewn in their paths."

"How many of those troopers do you think I could tackle in the shape I'm in?"

"About as many as you could before," said the doctor. He crossed and sat on a carton. "My advice is to go through channels." He fogged his stethoscope with his breath and rubbed it on his left buttock.

"Was it Nesbit's idea to arrest Carolyn?"

"I would imagine Laura had something to do with it," Dr. Jackstone said. He spread his legs so that he could read the lettering on the crate he was sitting on. "She's taken a liking to you. Look at this, a whole case of children's vitamin



pills, shaped like biblical animals. "That's fascinating."

"I don't have a concussion or anything, do I?" said Tim. It was easier to stand now.

"Do you feel as though you did?" Dr. Jackstone's eyes lit hopefully.

"No," said Tim. "But then I've never had one before."

"Take it easy today. See me tomorrow if you think you're really in serious trouble physically." The doctor slapped his knees and jumped off the box. "I have to get back at work, Tim. If you should develop a severe cough, which I hate to admit isn't too likely, I got in some nice fruit-flavored codeine."

"Thanks," said Tim. He walked into the jungle.

"Psst!"

Tim jumped back, startled.

A figure detached itself from the shadows. "It's me, Sheldon E. Stone."

"I thought you were a snake," Tim said. "What's up?"

"I've found a way out of here," Sheldon E. Stone said. "Part of the wall is broken, and I'm leaving tonight. I thought you might want to go with me."

"I can't," Tim said, thinking of Carolyn. "Would you deliver a message for me?"

"Sure. Where?"

"To Igoo-Clackens. I can't seem

to reach the outside world, probably because the Belgraf's don't want me to. Do you have a pencil?"

Sheldon fished in his jacket and produced a ball-point pen and some paper. Tim hesitated briefly, then began writing as fast as he could. Might as well tell all, even if the advertising people thought he'd become a candidate for the looney bin.

Finishing, he folded the paper and addressed the outside.

"Sure you don't want to come along," Sheldon asked, putting the message in his jacket.

"Sure. I've got some unfinished business here. Good luck."

Sheldon melted into the shadows, and Tim waited until the sounds of his retreat had faded. He half-expected to hear sirens and a burst of machine gun fire as a spotlight pinned the man against the wall, but none came.

Tim breathed a sigh of relief and hoped Sheldon wouldn't meet Nesbit in the jungle.

. . .

### *Chapter Fifteen*

Carolyn was being kept in one of the attic rooms of the main Belgraf house. At least that was where the half dozen green-and-silver-uniformed men who had carried her

off were standing guard. The ceilings were sharply pitched here and the men had to hunch. When one of them shuffled, his bayonet made a dusty arc on the plaster.

The sparsely-chinned lieutenant who had led the arresting group shook his head when he noticed Tim approaching. "Sorry about the roughhouse," the soldier said.

Tim had been roaming the house for several minutes. He hadn't gotten around to cleaning up his face and clothes. "I want to see Miss Loomis."

Jay, the wide blond one, started to lunge. His bayonet inscribed a line on the wallpaper and then entangled with a defunct gas lamp. "You and your aspersions," he said, bobbing his head out of the way of the scattering glass fragments of the lamp.

"No visitors," said the lieutenant, blocking Tim's way. "Without written permission."

Jay quivered and the lamp debris fell away from him. He scooted around the lieutenant and grabbed at Tim. "Interloper," he said.

Tim stepped carefully back and then swung his foot up and kicked Jay, a Technical Sergeant, in the crotch.

"That's not—" began Jay. Then he gave a half-spin and sat down on the Persian rug.

"I didn't expect so much violence when I joined this army," said the lieutenant. "You'd best go seek out Miss Belgraf or Mr. Belgraf if you want to talk to the prisoner, sir."

"Corner boy, street arab!" said Jay.

"Nobody'd better touch Miss Loomis again," said Tim. "At all." He turned and went back downstairs.

\* \* \*

"Permission denied," said Laura.

Tim had found her on the second floor landing. She was wearing a pair of green jodphurs, black boots and a green silver-trimmed blouse. She looked like the cover illustration on the kind of paperback they sell in bus terminals. "Where's your riding crop?" Tim asked, after she'd refused to let him talk to Carolyn.

"I broke it over someone's head."

He leaned back against an eagle head newel post. "Look, I'm being helpful, working on the propaganda with you. Let Carolyn loose, huh? I mean, doesn't all this seem sort of far-fetched?"

"A lot of people think treason can't happen," said Laura. Her nostrils were flaring. "It does though."

"You know there wasn't any treason involved yesterday. Nesbit lost his temper. The rest of it was a simple result of his troops not

being very well trained," Tim said. "You know he's getting more and more violent. It has nothing to do with Carolyn. Or with any conspiracy."

The girl looked away from him, brought her hand down against her thigh as if she were still carrying the riding crop. She descended to the first floor. "That isn't so."

"I want to see Carolyn," Tim repeated, following.

"You can't." She spun to face him. "You'll find out, McCarey, that sleeping with somebody doesn't give you any proprietary rights over her."

"Oh, so?"

"And if you continue in this negative mood I really think you won't be of much use to us," she grinned a sharp edged grin. "Nor we to you as far as the jungle goes."

"Come on, Laura," said Tim. "You aren't going to let Neshit pretend to carry on a trial. Turn Carolyn loose."

"There will be a trial," she said. "There will. Uncle Vincent is mapping it out right now. It is rolling on inexorably. You'll see, McCarey."

"Where's your uncle? In his study?"

"I won't tell you."

Tim took her arm. "Where?"

"He moved outside because

things were so hectic with prisoners and all. He's in Neshit's old playhouse. That's out back some quarter of a mile," she said. Pulling free she added, "You won't stop it. You've had your one and only roll in the hay with Carolyn. I guarantee you that, McCarey."

Tim stepped back. "Yes, ma'm," he said. He left the house.

A brass Humpty Dumpty teetered on the thatched roof of the old playhouse. The sharp wind nudged Tim toward the redwood door. He knocked on it just under the rabbit-headed knocker as a swirl of eucalyptus leaves rattled against the cottage. Looking out of the unshuttered part of the nearest window was a giant stuffed panda. "Mr. Belgraf," Tim called, knocking again.

"I'm in conference." The old man seemed to be right behind the gingerbread grill on the door.

"By yourself?"

"There's no precedent as to the number who can attend a conference," said Vincent Belgraf. "Shuttlecock vs. Bales proved that."

"I want to talk to you right now."

The wind gave Humpty Dumpty another shaking. After a moment the playhouse door creaked inward. "I'm becoming quite an expert on jurisprudence," said Belgraf.

Tim stepped inside and a shepherd's crook fell over in front of him. "It's about Carolyn," Tim said.

"Bo Peep," said the old man, stopping.

"What?"

Bel graf retrieved the staff and leaned it against a giraffe-shaped hatrack. "This was part of Nesbit's Bo Peep set. It's hard to imagine him with long golden hair and a dozen stuffed sheep, isn't it?"

"I've never tried." Tim followed Belgraf into a low, octagonal room. In the center was a short-legged round children's size table, piled with papers and law books. Around the edges of the room were tumblers of stuffed animals and toy cars and planes. Lemurs, rabbits, bears, elk, marmosets, dalmations, kangaroos, lady bugs and bats. Model T's, Terraplanes, Ford Trimotors, Piper Cubs, Buicks, Zeppelins and Reos. "I think this trial idea has to stop."

"You can't simply stop a trial," said Belgraf, pushing a velvet teddybear off a wicker chair and sitting down in it. "They tried that in the case of Boatwright vs. Boatwright. Look what happened to Boatwright."

"Which Boatwright?"

"That's immaterial," said the old man. "Treason is treason."

"And law is law. You can't hold a trial here."

"I hope you're not suggesting we hold it someplace else?" asked the old man. "No, no. They're always up to something on the outside. First they fluoridate your water, then they fluoridate your toothpaste. What will they fluoridate next?"

"I don't care! I'm talking about Carolyn Loomis. I want her turned loose now."

"People aren't turned loose in treason cases, McCarey. Was Roger Casement turned loose? No, he was stuck in the tower of London. Never trust a queer Irishman anyway."

"Mr. Belgraf," said Tim. He had to squat down to be on eye level with the old man in his children's chair. "You aren't really a judge, or even a lawyer. No one is, here."

"Don't have to be in a military trial," said Belgraf. "Did you know, McCarey, that the court of Ogadai Khan was rife with treason? To say nothing of the situation with Kuyuk Khan and Mangu Khan." He pointed one thin finger upward. "13th Century China can teach us many things."

"Let me suggest," said Tim, holding onto himself, "a change of venue. Hold the trial someplace else."

"I haven't come to that, what-

ever it is, yet in my reading. But, I repeat, anything that suggests going outside is not apt to turn my fancy. Warren Harding would be alive today if not for treason."

"I doubt that. Anyway, he'd be a hundred years old."

Belgraf's left eye gave a negligible wink. "All those Betty Crocker cake mixes are fluoridated, too. But they don't tell you that."

Tim straightened up and moved back. The wind slammed a shutter and a stuffed plush rat fell at Tim's feet. He stepped over it. "Listen," he began.

"I really have to get going on the floor plan for the court room. We're going to do over the spare ballroom — I don't recall you've ever been there since we haven't had a ball since your arrival — for the occasion." He lifted a felt marking pencil off a marble covered book.

Taking two deep breaths, Tim said, "Okay. Fine."

He strode into the hallway. He heard the shepherd's staff fall over again as he slammed the door and ran into the jungle to see Nesbit.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Sixteen*

Steam spun out of the not quite closed bathroom door. "Nesbit,"

said Tim, stopping in the center of the gorilla's bedroom. "Nesbit," he said again, louder.

The shower was running high and made hail sounds on the stall panels. Nesbit was singing. Rogers and Hart songs it sounded like. The steam fogged the bedroom windows, greying the day outside.

Tim kicked the door open and said, "Nesbit, I want to talk to you."

"Thou witty, thou grand," Nesbit sang. His voice slowed down into silence. The shower stopped. The part of the stall door with dolphins etched on it slid open. "Well, Tim, you're really getting to be one of the family." His big mouth made a wide grin. "A general always has time for his people, though. Yes?"

Tim dropped the lid down on the toilet and sat. The seat cover had appliqued tulips on it. "Very simple," he said. "I want you to let Carolyn go."

The gorilla stayed in the shower, dripping. His eyes watching Tim through the opening. "That's always a possibility," Nesbit said. Steam was rising from his damp fur.

Rubbing his nose, Tim said, "Meaning?" There was a thick smell of pine cones in the white tile room.

"There is a possibility Carolyn

will be acquitted. Not that treason trials come out that way much. Still, it could happen." He hunched one shoulder, shivered. "Hand over my robe, will you?"

Tim glanced at the terry cloth robe hanging from the handle of the medicine cabinet. Steam had brought out a large flat handprint on the mirror. "You know damn well that not you or anyone else here is qualified to pass judgment on Carolyn."

"To lead an army, to rule a nation," said Nesbit, "requires a lot more ability and chutzpah than handing down a verdict on one untrustworthy secretary." He swung out a paw and grabbed the bathrobe. "Carolyn isn't even a very good typist, if you come right down to it. Did you know that?"

Tim said, "You knew her before, didn't you?"

The gorilla hopped out of the stall, making a breast stroke motion as he got the robe on. His teeth slowly grew more visible. "Before what?"

"Before she came to work here."

Nesbit tied the cord. "I'd have to check personnel records."

Tim noticed now that the gorilla was wearing a red rubber shower cap on the back of his head. "You knew her in Los An-

geles or some place. You do have some kind of hold on her."

Nesbit started for the medicine cabinet. His wet feet made a squeegie sound and he began to fall. He grunted and caught at the sink. The sink grated and came half way off the wall. Nesbit grunted once more, righted himself. "I'm tired of being a nice guy with you. Go away. There's going to be a trial and Carolyn is going to be taken care of, Tim." He snapped the cabinet door open and pawed out a green squeeze bottle of deodorant. "She'll more than likely sink. Don't get pulled down with her."

Tim lowered his head for a second. He stood then. Not speaking, he left the bathroom. The deodorant bottle hissed twice.

Tim crossed the bedroom carefully.

In the hallway he said quietly, "God damn." He nodded to himself.

Out in the late afternoon he headed for the arsenal.

Tim found it difficult to sneak up on the arms supplies. Several dozen men were gathering around the plain board shack. Halting, Tim was about to backtrack when a soldier called to him, "Hey, McCarey."

"Huh?" It looked like Corporal

Wilkie, the one who'd gone through the window at the dinner party.

"Want to join a revolt?" asked the Corporal, moving through the twilight to Tim.

"What's your first move?"

Wilkie narrowed an eye. "You haven't said you're on our side yet."

"I came down here," said Tim, "to steal a rifle. They've got Carolyn Loomis locked up in the big house. I want to get her out."

Wilkie nodded. "That's as good a place to start as any. We'll save her. A nice girl I think, though cold in some of her dealings with the non-commissioned. After that we'll roust Nesbit."

A group around the arms shed door gave a cheer. The room had been successfully broken in to. "How about the guys who are loyal to Nesbit?" asked Tim.

"The officers mostly and a couple of dozen bleeding hearts. That's why we have to hurry. By now they've sneaked up to the big place to warn everybody."

Rifles and ammunition were passed around. The rifles ran out before Tim's turn came up. He got a .45 automatic, but no ammunition.

During the first moments of the siege Vincent Belgraf manned a

machine gun on the front porch. After Wilkie's army shot away most of the gingerbread trim several yards around him old Belgraf ducked inside. For all the shooting no one had hit him.

Wilkie tried to convey their request for the release of Carolyn under a flag of truce. From a second floor window Colonel Granger shot the flag pole out of the corporal's hands with a squirrel gun, causing Wilkie to discard the conventional rules.

"We'll have to seize the place and drag everybody out," said Wilkie.

"Carolyn could get hurt."

"You can't call all the shots in a war."

After fifteen minutes most of the men who'd made it to the big house to defend Nesbit and the Belgrafs had given up. Wilkie's side wasn't accurate in its marksmanship but the soldiers were all persistent and the firing from the rebels sounded much more dangerous than it was.

Dusk blacked down to night. Firing was not being returned from the old Victorian house much at all now. Tim had spotted Laura up in one of the towers. She had a revolver but only used it intermittently.

A roar of triumph went up and

two score of Wilkie's men stormed the front steps.

"Come on," said Wilkie.

"Hey," called a private. "He's ducking out the back."

"I'll get Nesbit," said Wilkie, not joining the main charge on the house.

Tim hesitated. He heard Carolyn's voice cry out from around the side of the house. He trotted along with Wilkie.

\* \* \*

### *Chapter Seventeen*

Fragments of stained glass blossomed from the attic. Nesbit came shooting out onto the shingles of the pitched roof and went skittering along the ridge of the highest gable. His spurs and the ornamental stock of his rifle sparked in the harsh moonlight.

"Now we'll get the bastard," said Wilkie, swinging his rifle upward.

Tim said, "He's got Carolyn." And chopped down with the flat of his hand against Wilkie's arm.

The girl was unconscious, apparently. Nesbit held her casually in the crook of his arm. As they watched he went sailing into the darkness. He thudded onto a lower roof, danced a spinning dance across it and then leaped again.

"It's like a damn jungle movie," said Wilkie, lowering his gun.

Nesbit jumped again, this time from a cupola straight into the jungle. "Damn," said Tim. He began running along the flagstone path that skirted the house.

Wilkie and two dozen other soldiers followed. "Don't shoot the girl," Wilkie told them.

Tim hesitated at the jungle edge. He listened and then heard Nesbit crashing off to the right. "The playhouse," Tim said.

Tim didn't notice he was wind-ed until he had dropped behind a cluster of bamboo to watch the cottage. Taking a deep breath made him dizzy and he had to catch hold of a spiked bush to keep from tumbling down.

"That's him on the roof," said one of Wilkie's men.

"No," said the former chief. "That's Humpty Dumpty. Don't get twitchy."

"He's inside," said Tim, catching a flash of silver.

Nesbit smashed out a window pane. A stuffed animal fell out with the broken glass. He began firing.

"Hold off shooting," whispered Wilkie. To Tim he said, "Come on." They began crawling, moving quietly for the back of the playhouse. "This jungle warfare



stuff comes in handy sometimes, huh?"

When they were behind the gingerbread house they heard Carolyn's voice say, "What the hell is going on, Nesbit? Why'd you drag me here."

Nesbit's reply was a low growl. "I might need a hostage. You were handiest." His rifle sounded once more.

Wilkie had selected a thin vine and cut off a length. "I've been curious to see if this works or not," he said. He was much more adept in the underbrush than he was in the kitchen. Soundlessly, he located the rear door to the little house. Getting it open he eased inside.

By the time Tim got into the dark room Wilkie was spinning over Nesbit's head. He'd tried to garrote him from behind and it hadn't worked. Nesbit roared anger. "Get in here," shouted Wilkie.

Nesbit threw him against the wall but the stuffed animals cushioned the impact.

Tim hurdled the round table and caught Carolyn up. "Come on."

Nesbit's paws got a grip on Wilkie and the Corporal yelled.

The front door shattered and a dozen soldiers made for Nesbit. One of them had grabbed up the hatrack and he walloped the gorilla over the skull with it. Nesbit

roared and clawed out at the men.

More soldiers had found the place now and they shattered windows and shivered shutters, forcing into the play room. It looked like a lopsided football game as Tim and Carolyn left.

Tim led Carolyn away, back toward their cottages. "Do you know where they've stowed my car?"

"There's a garage down by Gate F for visitors' cars and such," said the girl. "They probably brought it in off the road and stuck it there."

"We're going to leave. Got much to pack?"

"I can't," began Carolyn.

Coming toward them on the path was Laura Belgraf. "They're hurting Nesbit, aren't they?" she asked. In her right hand she had a .38 revolver.

Tim and Carolyn stopped. "Nesbit seemed to be on the losing side when we left the playhouse."

"All of them have deserted now. They all went over. Except for Jay, and the others roughed him up beyond recognition." Laura gestured with the pistol. Then, looking beyond them, she brightened. "Nesbit."

Tim pushed Carolyn out of the way and turned.

The gorilla was weaving, sway-

ing into tree trunks, stumbling over vines and branches. He shuffled to a halt a few feet away.

"Nesbit," said Laura, "where's your uniform?"

The gorilla wasn't wearing anything. He put his arched paws on his chest for a moment, his big head cocked at his sister.

"Don't bother to explain now," said Laura. "We'll get you hidden where they can't find you. I'll bandage up your hurts and you'll be fine. Nesbit?"

Nesbit flinched and then made a guttural sound. He repeated it twice. He leaned and his hands swept at the path. Glowering he made the noise again and then loped off the trail and into the jungle.

"He's crossed over for sure," said Tim.

"No," said Laura. "He's simply upset." She bit the knuckles of the hand that wasn't holding the gun and then started after the gorilla.

From the direction of the playhouse drifted Wilkie's voice. "Get some torches."

"The barracks," someone shouted.

Carolyn said, "He really is just a gorilla now? Finally."

"I think so."

"I suppose we can leave then," she said. "Yes, we can leave, Tim."

Far-off flames began to crackle.

Tim swung two suitcases into the trunk of his car; Carolyn added a hat box and three coats. "Fire department," said Tim, nodding at the sirens that were starting far outside.

Smoke was rising above the barracks area, cinders flickered up into the night sky. "The fire chief is a friend of old Belgraf. He won't make trouble," said Carolyn. She slid into the front seat.

Tim turned the ignition and tried the starter. Nothing happened. "Damn it. Car's been sitting here too long." He jumped out of the car.

"Will it start with a push?" asked Dr. Jackstone, who was hurrying along the path that wound by the garages.

"I imagine," said Tim. "Aren't you on your rounds?"

"I went down to open some of the gates for the ambulances. It's a field day for physicians." He dropped his black bag against a passion vine. "We'll roll it out of the garage and then down that way to Gate F."

"Great," said Tim. "This isn't going to mess up your hernia?"

"I'm betting it will."

As they worked the car slowly out of the garage Tim asked, "You going to be staying on here? I can give you a ride out."

"Not now," said the doctor, straining. "I've got a smorgasbord of contusions, gunshot wounds, minor burns and breakages to look after here. Plus the unique challenge of Neshit himself."

"He's really a gorilla completely, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Dr. Jackstone. "Just as well, too, I suppose. He always thought people were trying to make a monkey out of him!"

The car began rolling downhill. Tim leaped in and in a few yards the engine coughed and the motor began turning over. "Thanks, Dr. Jackstone."

"God bless, young people," called the doctor.

Tim pressed on the accelerator and the car catapulted toward freedom. A moment later, a fire engine and a truck and ladder hurtled past them heading for the blaze. The ladder was raised at a forty-five degree angle, and a broad-chested man was hanging from it, hair flying, beating his chest.

Behind the truck and ladder, a gold Cadillac convertible followed. A cameraman was in the backseat, shooting movies like mad. In the front seat, Joe Bryan was standing, shouting encouragements at the man on the ladder.

Tim braked the car and stared

at the disappearing truck. "He got through," he said wonderingly. "Sheldon got through."

"What is it, Tim," Carolyn said. "Who was that man up there?"

Tim smiled reassuringly, and started the car up again. "That was Hunneker himself. Going in to save his jungle!"

. . .

### *Chapter Eighteen*

The foam of the waves glowed white on the dark ocean. "Eventually," said Carolyn.

"Eventually what?"

"I'll tell you everything in detail," the girl said. "I knew Neshit, before he was this way of course. Back in Los Angeles. He was quite good looking in his auto racing days. Well, I got to know him pretty well. Once at a party, some pictures were taken. That's all. He had them, had them hidden away someplace only he knew about."

"That's why you worked for him?"

"Mostly," said Carolyn. "I needed a job when this opened up. At first I didn't think it would be so bad. When I tried to leave he told me about the pictures."

"Okay," said Tim. He put his hand over hers.

"I could have told you any time.

## NESBIT

It's my flair for remaining aloof and mysterious, even with people I'm fond of."

"What'll you do back in LA?"

She smiled. "Stay close to you if that's okay. What are your plans?"

"Well, third of all, I've got to do the script for the Nesbit movie, with the blessings of the Igoe-Glackens Agency. I convinced the Belgrafs that they should let Nesbit himself play the lead role and we should use their jungle, and I convinced Mr. Igoe that I should do the screenplay since I was right

here when everything was happening."

"Third of all?" Carolyn said, puzzled. "What happened to first and second?"

Tim held her close. "Well, first of all, we're going to get married."

He kissed her. "And second of all, we're going to have ourselves the best honeymoon anyone ever had."

"Do you believe in dreams? Really?" she said.

"Of course."

"I dreamed that you and I lived happily ever after," Carolyn said. And they did.

γ

Sylvia Dees is a professional photographer, an award-winning artist, and an amateur musician.

Ted White is a jazz critic, former METRONOME editor, and a contributor to various men's and science-fiction magazines. An original paperback science-fiction novel by him will be published this year. He is currently an editor for a national magazine.

## POLICY CONFERENCE

*Sylvia Dees and Ted White*

The Chief lifted His putter and sighted along the tee to the indoor putting cup at the other end of the room. He aimed carefully, then swung at the ball with a slow, clean stroke, his eye on the cup. The ball scooted along the carpet toward the cup, bovered at its brink . . . and rolled to one side.

"Goddammit to Hell!" He bel-lowed. The golf ball glowed for a second, a golden nimbus surrounding the white spheroid, and then winked out of sight. The Chief looked murderously at His club, and was deliberating the serious question of sending it after the ball, when the door opened and His personal secretary gingerly poked his head in.

"It's 11:30, Boss."

"Ahh, yes. Humm. Well, come in and sit down. I want to go over an outline of a new idea with you. Mind you, it's still a skeleton, but I want to see how the bones fit.

Want your reactions on it, Pete, of course."

He lowered Himself into the chair behind His desk, and began to ruffle several sheets of paper while Peter took the other chair and looked expectant.

"Now of course I haven't gone over this with the others yet, but what would you say to the idea of inviting Of Nik to come up bere for a brief visit? It strikes me this could do a great deal in furthering interregional relations . . ."

"But, Boss! Tha's - why that's never been done before!"

"Of course!" The Chief beamed proudly. "I'd never thought of it before!"

"But it might lead to greater regional tensions . . ."

"Nonsense, Pete! It'll be great for Peace and Goodwill. And of course if Nik accepts a tour through our region, he'll be socially obligated to ask me for a return

## POLICY CONFERENCE

trip." The Chief's eyes sparkled at the thought and then a benign smile settled over His face, as, from the corner of His eye, He calculated the distance between the golf tee and the cup. Perhaps if they were closer . . .

"What about our recent immigrants? A lot of them still remember Nik's oppression."

"Ah, just a small minority. We'll put the publicity department on it and within two weeks Nik will be the most sought-after celebrity here. Why, they'll be begging him to visit their homes. After all, most of our people have never come face to face with him before. Besides, we've got a good security force. I'm sure we'll have no incidents marring his stay."

"Boss, you know the Uncommitted. Peoples might just think that your inviting Nik here is a tactical gain for him. You know, an admission on your part that his way of life is better, or like that."

"Sheer foolishness, Pete. That's sheer foolishness! Why, Nik is simply very sadly misinformed about us. I think it will be obvious to everyone that by inviting him here, and letting him see with his own eyes that we are a strong, simple, peaceloving, Godfearing people — why, I shouldn't be sur-

prised if we even won him over!

"After all, this state of hostilities has been going on for a long time — far too long, now that I think of it — and I think it is up to us to make the first bold move for reconciliation."

"In the end, we can't help convincing him and the entire universe that ours is 'The Better Way!'"

Peter's face had brightened perceptibly as he absorbed The Chief's ideas and enthusiasm for the new project. "Well, Boss," he said, "you've convinced me. I guess I better start setting things up, huh?"

"Yes, and, um, speaking of that, would you mind moving that cup over this way a little? Ummm, yeah, there. Thanks."

\* \* \*

It was late afternoon, and a multitude of vanished golf balls later, when Peter next popped his head into The Chief's sanctum sanctorum.

"Boss?"

The Chief angrily snapped His last putter across his knee and consigned it to other regions. Then he sighed. "Yes, Pete, what is it?"

"I think you better take a look at this. It just came in by special

messenger." He handed The Chief a thin sheet of asbestos. Its message was short and fiery:

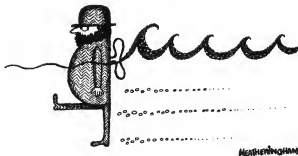
*Let it be known throughout the Regions of Hell and all of the Above that on this Day the Prince of Darkness, the Devil Himself, does declare complete and total Hot War upon Heaven for that Aggressor's invasion and bombardment of the Nether Regions*

*with a myriad of small, hard and dangerous white pellets in a completely unwarranted and inexcusable attack.*

*/by/ His Satanic Majesty  
Nik*

The Chief sat down slowly, and shook His head. "Well, Pete," he said, "it looks like we have a lot of heavy thinking to do on this. Want to set yourself up a tee?"

γ



Charles Beaumont is no stranger to these pages or to the thousands of avid readers and television and movie viewers who have enjoyed his work over the past several years. His story *Mourning Song*, which appeared originally in *CAMEO 1*, was selected by Judith Merrill for inclusion in her current anthology, *Ninth Annual Year's Best S-F*.

Beaumont is a lover of fine automobiles, as many of his stories have indicated. The following is the latest Beaumont automobile story — about a car that drives a man.

## AUTO SUGGESTION

*Charles Beaumont*

"Why?" Mr. Llewellyn demanded, listening to the symphony of hate behind him. "Why?" he moaned.

He twisted his head around and shuddered: a great shining sea of cars, all the cars in the world it seemed, honking in outrage, honking in anger, honking, honking.

Mr. Llewellyn closed his eyes. Well, at least Miss Minifree wasn't along. That would have made it so much worse. He tried to think: he calm, he calm. For the tenth time he put his foot onto the starter, *swallowed drily. Please, he thought, please car, Non Omnis my old friend, please . . .*

He listened to the grinding noise and felt droplets of cold perspiration soak into his shirt.

*Urrr-urrr-urrr. Urrr-rrr.*

Terrified, he removed his foot. The percussion sounds were rising in hack, louder, louder, unspeakably furious. HONK! *You're a fool,*

*Abner Llewellyn! HONK! You're a bungling HONK! incompetent silly BEEP! ineffectual RRROO-GA! pathetic little MOVE IT FOR CHRISSAKES MAC! —*

Mr. Llewellyn wrenched open the door, got out and went around to the front of his car and lifted the hood.

Something with the sparkplugs, he thought. Those little white things. He touched them. Then he touched other things, wires, the dip stick, the generator, ran his fingers over the rubber and metal. Oh God. It could be anything, anything!

Suddenly he wished that he were dead; dead in some graveyard where no cars honked and no wives shrieked and no bosses bel-lowed, where it was quiet and rest —

"The ignition," someone said softly.

Mr. Llewellyn jerked at the



sound, hitting his head smartly on the upraised hood, crushing his hat. Things started to go purple. "What?"

"The ignition — you forgot to turn it back on."

Mr. Llewellyn turned to face the scornful smile, the patronizing snickering unbelieving —

But no one was there. Just the freeway and the illimitable vista of stalled automobiles; and the people in the automobiles, angry, redfaced.

"Hurry!"

The voice was firmer this time, not so soft. And — Mr. Llewellyn felt faint — it appeared to be issuing from beneath his own vehicle.

"Hurry, hurry! The ignition!"

A truck's air horn began some car lengths away. A frightening sound, a terrible sound, like the scream of a wounded elephant, and it led the other smaller cars to renew their anger, shrill now beneath the dump-truck's mighty bellow, shrill and chattering, like arboreal creatures gone mad.

Mr. Llewellyn slammed down the hood.

"Gently!" someone said in his ear.

He ran to the door and scrambled quickly into the driver's position. In the rear-view mirror: people piling out onto the pave-

ment: men, women, walking toward him.

"The ignition, you idiot! Wake up!"

Mr. Llewellyn looked at the keys. It was true. He reached down and turned the key. His right foot came down upon the starter. An everlasting second of waiting, while things abraded loudly, waiting for the inscrutable but familiar feelings and signs, and then the sound of life, the rising pulse and roar of the motor breathing: power.

He took a quick swipe at his forehead and depressed the clutch. People were standing outside now, looking in.

He took his foot from the accelerator pedal and attempted to wrest the gearshift into place. It wouldn't go. More people outside. Laughing? Was that laughing he heard?

Low. Get into low. Get in there! He pulled the shift down with all his strength, listening to the awful grinding: at last — it was done. Now. He let out the clutch. Too fast. The car jerked, bounced, bobbed, threatened to stall. Mr. Llewellyn fought it, hard: control, control. Just get away is the thing now, away from the faces and their expressions of awe and stupefaction, away from the mockers.

## AUTO SUGGESTION

He didn't wait for complete mastery over his vehicle. He stabbed at the clutch another time, mindless of the picture he was presenting, mindless that the car was bucking like a Brahma bull, and shoved the gearshift into second. And down again to high.

He was on his way.

"Knobheads!" someone said.

Mr. Llewellyn twitched at the voice, forgot about the road, examined the interior of the car and swung back in time to miss a concrete lamp post, narrowly.

"What's that? Who's talking?"

There was a short silence. Then: "Me."

Mr. Llewellyn revolved a finger in his ears. He shook his head several times. Someone was talking to him. But no one was there. A bad business.

"Perfectly normal cats," the voice said, "but let 'em get inside us and right away what are they? Schnpoks! Inconsiderate, ill-mannered and sadistic. Check?"

"What?" Mr. Llewellyn said. "What?" He reached for the radio, remembered that he'd never had one installed. No radio.

Cars were passing in faster lanes. People scowling, grinning, shrugging. Honking.

"Loud-mouthed bastards! Give me a pain in the piston. I'm sick of

it. Aren't you?"

Mr. Llewellyn said nothing; he stared straight ahead.

"Well, aren't you?" the voice demanded

"W-what?"

"Sick of these loud-mouths?"

"I — that is —"

"Man, enough is too much. Honk me."

"I beg pardon?"

"Honk me! Toot me!"

"Good heavens!" Dazedly, Mr. Llewellyn permitted a finger to touch the round black horn button, lightly. It reminded him that in his entire life he had never honked the horn of a car. Never. Well — this was an old car. Wouldn't make more than a courteous beep, wouldn't even be heard, probably. No harm in it.

He pressed the button.

The noise burst out instantly, from a shrill whine to an eardrum fracturing cacophony. Paralyzed with astonishment, Mr. Llewellyn forgot to remove his finger from the horn, and he could see other automobiles ahead lurching, veering, skittering at the blast. And above the caterwaul, loud as new, overpoweringly loud — he now recalled the salesman years ago mentioning something about special triple horns — there was a wild chuckling. The his hand slip-

ped off and the noise stopped.

"That'll teach 'em!" the chuckling voice said.

"See here," Mr. Llewellyn cried, beside himself, "who are you? Who's talking to me?"

"I am." The voice seemed to come from the dashboard, or from behind the dashboard.

"Cars," Mr. Llewellyn said after a long while, "cannot talk."

He drove silently, thinking. About numerous things. Non Omnis, particularly: Non Omnis Moriar, the name he had given to the car on a whim . . . He had whims in those days, the days before Charlotte and the job and — the rest of it.

He became lost in thought and so was not entirely conscious of the low-throated snarl until it had pulled alongside him. He glanced over and saw the other car, a sleek convertible with its top down. The driver was smiling, not good-naturedly. One last smile and then the rumble and spit of dual exhausts and the canary colored racer was off, leaving the fumes of ignominy in Mr. Llewellyn's nostrils.

"We gonna take that?" someone asked.

"Ob," Mr. Llewellyn said.

"Come on — he's fast, but we're clever. We'll outthink him."

Mr. Llewellyn kept the speedometer needle at a steady thirty-five, as set forth in the Vehicle Code, Section —

"Come on! We can still take him. Look at the schlemiel: all he knows is speed. Abner, you gonna let a dumb jerk make a fool of you — again? Aren't you fed up with being low man?"

Mr. Llewellyn felt his foot sink down on the accelerator pedal. The speedometer rose slowly from thirty-five to forty, to fifty, to fifty-five —

"That's it! That's it! Now cut right — there's a hole!"

Mr. Llewellyn breathed deep, fought to keep himself from throwing a glance over his shoulder. But he seemed to have lost all control over himself. He slid into the temporary opening between cars.

"Great! Now! Into the other lane!"

Fifty-five — sixty — sixty-five — Mr. Llewellyn had never driven so fast before in his life. He didn't even know the car would do over fifty. He saw himself creeping up behind the yellow convertible.

"Okay. Fine. Easy now, be careful — wait for that Olds. Good: he's blocked off. Now swing back to the other lane. Come on, come on!"

Mr. Llewellyn pulled out and

## AUTO SUGGESTION

listened to the scream of tires against cement as he plugged another small hole in traffic. The horns were going wild.

"Okay," the voice cried, "Wrap it up!"

Mr. Llewellyn's foot planked down hard against the floor, straining. Non Omnis shot forward orgiastically and the convertible was passed in a blur of yellow.

"Atta boy! Atta boy!"

Mr. Llewellyn slowed down in time for the turn-off to his street. He crossed both lanes of traffic, just missing a pickup truck and a startled little Austin.

But Mr. Llewellyn was no less startled. At his reflection in the mirror, for example: he was grinning. He listened for the voice, but there was no voice now: only the tinkle of pistons, the many motor sounds of an old car.

He shuddered slightly at the memory of the past hour and remembered that he was late, very late, and that Charlotte would be angry, very angry.

He parked in the garage, listened a moment. "Non Omnis?" he said softly. "Non Omnis?"

Then he switched off the engine, picked up his newspaper and went inside the house.

A bank teller is a bank teller,

Mr. Llewellyn thought. Is a husband is a poor provider is a misser-out is a dweller in the world which is a world immutable irrevocable irremediable and rotten. That is all, that is the end, you die.

Therefore: It's possible that you were overwrought, nervous, susceptible. Therefore: It's impossible that your car actually talked to you.

A bird may crawl on the ground, but a snake may never fly. And — "Abner."

Mr. Llewellyn descended abruptly from the high plateau of abstract thought and faced Miss Miniffee, little Miss Miniffee, smiling and pink dressed.

"Going to work overtime, Abner?"

"No. Just tidying up."

"Can I catch a ride with you?"

Mr. Llewellyn became excited. She had stopped riding with him when Charley Doolittle arrived on the scene. He had thought it was all over, all those pleasant painful minutes.

"Of course. You surely may."

Miss Miniffee blushed slightly. "Charley usually goes right by my place. He's working late, though."

And then they were in the car and the day was behind them.

And Mr. Llewellyn thought about Miss Miniffee. In her pink

dress. He saw her skin, the smoothness of milk, the color of copper. Oh, she had liked him, once. She really had.

He eased aside the picture of Charlotte, porcine of construction, skin like a worn gladstone bag, shrill-voiced, old. He dizzied from the perfume smell of Miss Miniffee, from the forever invitation of her smile.

"Why not?"

Mr. Llewellyn's heart constricted. That voice again.

"No, no," he whispered.

"How's that?" Miss Miniffee said.

It must not happen. Not again. "Nothing — I didn't say anything."

She turned away, after a long look.

There was a chuckling.

"Yes, Abner?"

Mr. Llewellyn was about to explain that it hadn't been he, but thought the better of it. He smiled blankly.

Miss Miniffee swung around in her seat to face him, mouth slightly parted to reveal very white teeth and behind them a tongue which was small and moist.

You had your chance, that mouth almost said, you had it and you fluffed it because you're weak and that's why I ride home with Charley now.

The disembodied voice boomed

with cordiality. "Hey," it said, "I want to ask you a question."

Mr. Llewellyn stiffened. The voice sounded now exactly like his own.

"Uh huh?" Miss Miniffee said.

"Just wondering if you had anything on tonight."

"Just what you see, honey," Miss Miniffee said, sliding closer to him at a curve of insufficient excuse.

"How about dinner?"

"You mean — us, Abner?"

"That I do."

"Well — I mean, what about the Mrs.?"

"Charlotte and I are through. Finished. Washed up. She'll go her way, I'll go mine."

"You wouldn't kid a girl, would you?"

"Miss Miniffee, do I strike you as the 'kidding' sort?"

"Nooo —" Miss Miniffee studied him. Then she smiled. "Okay," she said. "You know where I live. About seven?"

"Seven it is."

"And — you're sure it's all right?"

"All right? Baby, it's the greatest!"

Mr. Llewellyn wiped his forehead and applied the brake. Miss Miniffee touched his arm and squeezed. "I got a dress," she said, "that's going to knock you out."

The voice like Mr. Llewellyn's

## AUTO SUGGESTION

said, "You'd be a knockout in anything, baby!"

Miss Minifec looked puzzled, then she laughed, squeezed his arm again and got out. Mr. Llewellyn roared off immediately, beating out a Cadillac to the freeway entrance.

A block from home, he could see his wife standing at the curb, staring at him. He tried to slow down, as he had been trying, but it was no use. The car thundered along the residential street at a steady fifty-five and screeched to within three feet of the large woman, who yelped and jumped backwards.

"Ahner! Have you gone crazy? Get out of that car this instant and come inside. I've got some talking to do with you."

"Now what?" Mr. Llewellyn sank down in the seat, looking about him for escape frantically. The voice was loud and arrogant.

Mr. Llewellyn's wife opened her mouth. "Well!" she said at last, "if you don't care what the neighbors think, then I'm sure I don't. It so happens that Mrs. Purdy saw you with that awful girl from work."

"Now, now, my dear —" Mr. Llewellyn began, but his voice was submerged by the voice from the dashboard — or was it from

the dashboard? "You can tell Mrs. Purdy to go take a flying leap —" "Ahner!"

Mr. Llewellyn strained, tried to force his hand to the door, but he couldn't move. Non Omnis idled noisily.

"Ahner, come into the house. Supper is ready."

"Tough luck, Fatso. I got other plans."

"I — I —"

"Maybe I'll get home tonight, maybe not — don't hold your breath." The voice began to sing: "Man, I'm all knocked out, I've got a fit, for a chick with a body that just won't quit!"

Mrs. Llewellyn clutched at her heart. She reeled.

Mr. Llewellyn could no longer move. His eyes bulged grotesquely. "Stop it," he hissed. "Shut up. Keep quiet. Be still."

"You come inside this very minute, do you hear, Ahner?"

"Got news for you, baby: You've had it."

"What are you talking about?"

"What am I talking about? Sugar, I mean I just don't dig your jazz no mo'."

"Wh — What are you going to do?" the fat woman stammered, chins quivering.

"Have a hall, man," the voice hollered. "A B-A-double-L. hall!

"Bye now." With which Mr. Llewellyn was off, leaving a cloud of rich black smoke.

The chuckling was insane.

Out of sight of the house, Mr. Llewellyn fell back against the seat limply.

"I don't understand," he said. "I don't understand. Non Omnis — why are you doing this? Why haven't you ever talked before?"

"Never felt like it," the voice answered.

"But — it's impossible. Good grief, can *all* cars talk?"

"Isn't that just a little ridiculous?"

Mr. Llewellyn nodded. He glanced at his watch. It was six-fifteen.

A custom job, chopped and channeled, blown and stroked, passed by in a wild splutter of exhaust.

Mr. Llewellyn stopped fighting it. He felt his foot come down hard on the accelerator.

Outside it was dark, still and dark, desolate. The beach wind was icy-cold. The girl with the cinnamon skin sighed luxuriously as they came to a stop high in the hills. "Mmmm" she sighed, stretching.

"Baby," said the voice like Mr. Llewellyn's, "where have you been all of my life?"

"Around," Miss Miniffee said. Her off-the-shoulder angora sweater came down off the other shoulder. Mr. Llewellyn studied the thin prominences of collar bone and neck muscle.

"Have kicks tonight?"

"Plenty, I'll say," she murmured.

"Then explain to me what you're doing all the way over there."

"Mmm." Miss Miniffee had lost her puzzled look. She slid across the seat until her body touched Mr. Llewellyn's own. He jumped.

"That's more like it."

"Abner — you're so different," she said. "Where have you been all your life?"

Whereupon, for a reason he did not pause to analyze, Mr. Llewellyn turned, put his arms about Miss Miniffee and kissed her upon the lips. This caused a peculiar reaction from Miss Miniffee, who was now saying "Mmm" regularly.

Time passed.

At length they were on the road again.

Mr. Llewellyn, too assailed by emotion to speak, barely heard the voice say: "Gloria, you are the greatest!"

But he heard Miss Miniffee's answer. "Abner, I've always gone for you."

"But what about Charley Doo-little?" Mr. Llewellyn asked.

## AUTO SUGGESTION

"Doolittle, schmoolittle, that square! I mean, it didn't look like I was getting no place with you, and a girl has got to have somebody . . . even second best . . ."

"Well, you're getting someplace with me now."

"A lot of good! Here you're married and all — it's hopeless, I guess."

"Nuts!" said the voice, loudly.

"Gloria — let's run away together!"

"Okay. Where to?"

"Zapotec, Azerzaljan — what's it matter? Get away from it all — live, sweetheart, live!"

"Gee," Miss Minifree said, "but that'll take dough, won't it?"

Mr. Llewellyn felt his hand curl around the girl's shoulder and listened to his answer.

"Don't worry. I'll get the dough."

The speedometer rose to seventy and the surf became a roar merged with the motor's roar, and Mr. Llewellyn shivered.

"But," he whispered hoarsely, "that would be illegal!"

"So what? Listen, dad, it's almost morning now — check?"

Mr. Llewellyn nodded. Almost morning: the latest he had ever stayed up. Why wouldn't Non Omnis Moriar even let him get out? They'd gone to a drive-in, he'd honked for Gloria from the

curb — he hadn't been out of the car for almost fifteen hours!

"So what could be simpler? You got a key. What's-his-name the guard you know. You walk in, say you forgot something, let him have it, open the vault, grab the dough — and, man! You're gone with the wind! Think of it: Gloria, money, a new life: no more banks, no more Charlottes — think about it."

Mr. Llewellyn thought about it. He shook his head. "Absolutely not," he said.

The car kept talking, wheedling, cajoling, yelling — then, the voice changed to a low Machivellian tone. "If," it said, "you don't — I'll drive us both off a cliff. How'd you like that?"

"All right. All right!"

They discussed it lengthily. Then, Mr. Llewellyn found himself in front of the Corn Husker's Security Building.

"It's all up to you now, Jack. All up to you. Charlotte or Gloria. The life you've led or the one you *could* lead if you've got the guts. Make your choice."

Mr. Llewellyn trembled. He looked up and down the streets: no one afoot, at this hour. For the first time he summoned the power to open the door.

"Make it snappy," the voice said. "I'll leave my motor running."



Run away, Mr. Llewellyn thought. But something held him. His life passed in a gray parade across his mind. He went to the door, turned the key, closed the door again.

"Yes, sir?" the guard said.

"Correction in the tapes, Frank," Mr. Llewellyn said; he knew he would be believed, as the only combination teller entrusted with a key.

The guard smiled and started for the lights. Mr. Llewellyn opened his jacket and removed the lug wrench.

The guard moaned softly and crumpled to the floor.

Mr. Llewellyn moved to the inert body, found some keys, went to the vault. Two doors opened. A big steel one did not open. It had a combination lock. Mr. Llewellyn remembered the numbers, tried them.

The door snapped open, and Mr. Llewellyn proceeded to select from the safe numerous bundles of currency, for the most part crisp. A moment later, he closed and locked the steel door and hurried outside.

"Did you get it?" the car croaked.

"Shut up!" Mr. Llewellyn harked. "Just get going!"

He peeled rubber for several

feet and then began to zigzag across town.

"Man," the voice screamed, "we're in! We're in!"

Mr. Llewellyn pulled to a noisy stop in front of a small white-plaster house. He kicked the gear into neutral, dashed into the house and emerged some ten seconds afterwards with Miss Miniffee in his arms.

"But —" Miss Miniffee said. "But —"

At sight of the money, however, a smile came to her face. She put her arms around Mr. Llewellyn and kissed him, saying "Oh! Oh!"

Mr. Llewellyn dumped the nightgowned girl into Non Omnis, slammed the door and jumped into the driver's seat.

"Where'll it be?" he yelled above the engine's frenzy. "Yucatan? Madrid? Palm Beach?"

Miss Miniffee had just begun to clap her hands, when, quite suddenly, the air was torn by the treble whine of sirens. Tiny cycloped eyes winked redly in the rear-view mirror.

Grimly, Mr. Llewellyn poured on the gas and cackled as he took a corner on no more than two wheels.

"Ahner," Miss Miniffee wailed, "have you done something wrong?"

"No," he answered, cornering

## AUTO SUGGESTION

sharp and going into a flat-out slide.

Early morning houses whipped by like a film run too fast. But maneuver as he might, Mr. Llewellyn could not be rid of the frenetic red eyes, nor could he expunge the nightmare sound of sirens, more sirens now.

"Hang on,, baby!" he called and pointed them up the slender ribbon of road which led through the hills to the valley on the other side.

Miss Miniffee hung on.

"Don't worry, Abner," someone other than Miss Miniffee chortled, "we'll shake 'em!"

The hairpin turns were accomplished by dint of a skill edging on genius. As he climbed, happy now the night behind was only dawn-darkness, Mr. Llewellyn invariably headed for the cliff-sides, for the emptiness of space and the dizzying drops, only to brake, slide and whip around at the last possible instant.

Finally they hit a straightaway. Miss Miniffee had fainted: her Italian-boy-haircutted head lolled on its shoulders with a dreamy motion. Her chestnut skin seemed to have blanched.

Mr. Llewellyn patted the girl's behind in a gesture of profound understanding and camaraderie.

Soon the red eyes were back again and gaining, always gaining.

At the second entrance to the cliffs, the first shot was fired. He could not hear it, but he saw the white puff.

"YAHH, missed!" Mr. Llewellyn screeched, attempting to push the accelerator pedal clear through the floorboard.

More shots. "Close!" someone whispered.

And more. They were buzzing like hornets and from time to time, Mr. Llewellyn could feel the lead-on plosh of a hit.

He smiled fiercely, even when the tire exploded, didn't stop smiling for a moment as Non Omnis went into a spin.

Just before they went over the side, he managed to get the door opened. A mighty lunge threw Miss Miniffee to safety on the green and gentle sward.

The tires clung an infinite second: as they were suspended there on the brink, Mr. Llewellyn smiled, if anything, more brightly than before.

Then they went over. Over and over. Around and around. And Non Omnis cried with pain every time a new boulder was struck.

Many hundreds of feet below, Mr. Llewellyn tried to move and found he could not. Metal envel-

oped him like the bandages of a mummy. He was able to get one hand free.

With this hand he stroked the twisted remains of a wooden steering wheel — tenderly, gently, softly.

"Non Omnis — Non Omnis —"

"Moriar," the car said; and, with a last metallic rattle, died.

Mr. Llewellyn saw the little specks of light descending the abyss. Then there were more specks until his mind was a microscope under which coruscated a million disks of light. Getting dimmer, getting dimmer . . .

He rubbed the pitted plaster wall. White. All so white. And clean and sterile —

And he kept thinking — he had not stopped saying it to himself —: *I am insane. Buggy, mad as a March Hare* . . .

Schizophrenia was the word they used.

"Of course your car talked you into it, Mr. Llewellyn, of course it did. Nothing unusual in that. Now everything's all right. We've put your car in another room and as soon as it's able to get around, why, we'll have it visit you. And won't that be nice?"

Normal matter, they said. Actually harmless case. Repressed personality builds ideal other self; ideal other self is embodiment of all repressed personality's frustrations transfigured into complete antithesis . . .

*And I'm a looney.*

Mr. Llewellyn sat on the bed. Then he arose, for this always made him think of the girl with the inviting smile who would have gone far away with him, who would go yet, even now, he was sure, sure of it.

He stared out the window gloomily at the grotesquely pleasant rolls of lawn and beyond, the high white wall.

If only there were some way to get out — some way — He would be more careful. He wouldn't let them catch him.

Then he looked at the solemn gates of the wall. "Bars!" he murmured. "Always, bars. And I'll never get out. Never."

There was suddenly the sound of splintering pottery. A vase had fallen to the floor and crashed into hundreds of pieces, sharp pieces, sharp enough to cut flesh.

"Want to take bets?" the vase said, softly.

Chester H. Carlfi, best known for such stories as *THE INSCRUTABLE PUMPKIN*, *BELLS IN THE NIGHT*, and *THE BURMESE MASK*, has been a popular writer in the suspense and science-fiction fields ever since his first sale of a television script to *CAPTAIN VIDEO AND HIS VIDEO RANGERS* a dozen years ago. Since that time, he has sold over 1,000 pieces in a variety of fields, including mystery, science-fiction/fantasy, juveniles, and travel.

A graduate of the University of Chicago, Carlfi has lived and traveled extensively throughout the Far East. His favorite stopping place is Hong Kong, which he says is an "incredible city." A bachelor, he resides in a Spanish-style home high in the hills above Hollywood, California, with a giant German Shepherd dog named "Angel". His hobbies include skydiving, skindiving, and drinking Japanese sake.

## WELCOME TO PROCYON IV

*Chester H. Carlfi*

Night came swiftly. One minute there was sunlight, with the red sand shifting beneath a blue-violet sky and the dead city casting long shadows. Then, quite suddenly, like a candle being extinguished, there was darkness. The air grew cold, glittering with frost in the starlight. The shallow water of the muddy canals became frozen mirrors reflecting the night.

The wind whispered rhetorically into the ears of the dead city, stirring dust from silent rooftops, meaning among broken windows and shattered spires.

The stars were pinpoints in the black sky, and the two moons hardly more. On all of Procyon IV only one light shone, a red glow from a flickering fireplace in a small cabin huddled at the edge

of the city near a great canal and a greater desert.

In the cabin, Jameson stood quietly in one corner, leaning over an ancient radio and listening to the crackly static. For many years the radio had been silent, but now voices came from it. Earth-voices. He smiled, hearing them, remembering days when this planet had echoed to such voices. His excitement grew as he listened to the Earth-voices, lost in the static. He could barely make out the words. But no matter. They were human voices, and with each passing day the sounds grew stronger.

"We're going to have visitors," be announced.

His wife, sitting at the table, said nothing.

Jameson left the machinery and the radio and collapsed happily in a chair beside her. "How long has it been, Helen, since the Earthmen were here?" He couldn't remember, but it had been years. Years! "We've grown old since then," he said. Earthmen had come to Procyon IV like conquerors and fled, whimpering like frightened dogs.

For this planet was dead and in its corpse-hand held death. There were no more natives now, but they had left diseases with which Earth medicine could not cope. The Earthmen died deaths that

were painful and unpleasant, and the survivors fled back to Earth where they could work in the safety of their laboratories to overcome these diseases. And now, at last, they had apparently succeeded, for they were returning.

"I'm not sorry I stayed," Jameson said to his wife. "After coming across the millions of miles, I couldn't go back. I was willing to take the chance of not becoming immune. We've had good years together." He sought his wife's hand, found it.

They had been good years. Years of roaming across the vast alien deserts, poking curiously through silent deserted cities, discovering the rusting artifacts of a long-dead civilization. He'd had the planet all to himself. He bathed in the trickling streams of the canals, walked restlessly across dead seabottoms, finding fossils and strangely-shaped seashells that gleamed iridescently in the light from the distant sun.

Without Helen he could not have had the heart to stay here, to go out and return. And never once across the lonely years had she complained. There had been some bad moments at first when the disease struck, terrible moments of waiting and not knowing. But then it was over. If she had died —

## WELCOME TO PROCYON IV

He stopped the thought, refusing to consider it.

Often in the night he had listened to the silent radio, power turned high, and had heard nothing. There was no one else left. And Earth was far, far away. Then days ago, the static and faint voices. Voices that grew stronger with each passing day. Now they were coming back.

"I must be ready for them," he said.

The next day he made the preparations. He went to the rocket-port and cleared off a landing cradle, laboring far into the afternoon. The Earthmen would be surprised, he thought, chuckling. And he strung wires about the landing spot, and rigged them to generators that hadn't been used in years but which hummed to life beneath his prompting. Slowly, a small portion of the landing field came alive, a small clean spot that would welcome the returnees.

And finally they came.

The Earth rocket came down out of the alien sky and settled on a tail of flame. Jameson rushed out to meet it. Far up on the spaceship's side a door opened, a ladder extended, and two Earthmen climbed down.

"Captain Marcus," the first one

said, introducing himself, "and this is my aide, Lieutenant Stark. We didn't think there was anyone left alive here."

"There isn't," Jameson said excitedly, "except me and my wife, Helen. She's waiting for us at the cabin. I'll bet it's a long time since you've had a home-cooked meal."

The two Earthmen smiled.

"You've been out here a long time," the Captain said sympathetically.

"Yes," Jameson agreed, "a long time."

They walked slowly toward the cabin.

"Guess you'll both be glad to see Earth again," the Lieutenant said.

"Yes," Jameson said. "Helen hasn't seen another woman in years. She'll want to see the skyscrapers, the latest fashions — so many things!"

They stopped before the cabin. Jameson opened the door and went inside. The two officers followed him.

"Helen," Jameson said in his politest voice. "I'd like you to meet Captain Marcus and Lieutenant Stark, who've come to take us back to Earth. Gentlemen," he waved a proud hand, "my wife."

The lieutenant gasped.

The captain stared. "Why — why, she's —"

He said something ugly, something that was not only untrue, it was indecent and shocking. Angri-ly, Jameson pulled a hidden gun from beneath his shirt. He squeezed the trigger and Captain Marcus fell. Before he could fire again, Lieutenant Stark turned and ran, but Jameson merely walked to the door and watched the officer disappear behind a dune. Seconds later, a tiny speck scampered up the Earth rocket's ladder.

Jameson moved to the machinery beside his radio. He pressed a button that would send current through certain wires he had rigged on the landing field. An explosion from outside.

Then — the familiar quiet again.

He sank into a chair by the table.

"Why? he asked himself, Helen, the silent planet. "Why did he have to say those terrible things?"

Jameson rose, went to his wife, gently took her shoulders in his hands. "We're all alone again, you and I. You'll stay with me, won't you? You said once you'd leave with the others, but I *made* you stay. You won't ever leave me, you won't!"

He shook her, and her head bobbed. A snap, and her head fell to the floor and rolled into the corner.

Hastily — sorry for what he'd done — Jameson retrieved the skull, dusted it off, and carefully, gently, lovingly wired it once more onto the frail skeleton neck.

"There," he said, returning to his own seat. He smiled at his wife. "We don't care if the Earth-men stay away forever. We have each other."

His wife said nothing, but that was all right.

Everything was fine again.



The prolific Richard Matheson is currently hard at work on a new feature film for Academy Award winner Sidney Poitier, is creating the pilot film for a science-fiction series based on one of his own ideas, and is writing another novel which threatens to become a best seller.

Dick's ability to capture a mood and sustain it was obvious from his first published story many years ago, the chilling BORN OF MAN AND WOMAN. He has since lived up to that promise, in his many screenplays adapting the Edgar Allan Poe classics. INTEREST, which follows, carries on that tradition.

## INTEREST

*Richard Matheson*

"I'm sorry," Cathryn said, lowering her eyes in embarrassment, "I shouldn't gape so. It's just that I've never been in such a beautiful home before."

She looked across the wide snowy-clothed table for support. But Gerald's returned smile was as tight and restrained as her's. She glanced at his father from the corners of her eyes. Mr. Cruickshank seemed to be absorbed in running his silver-handled knife through the butter soft filet mignon.

"We understand, my dear," said Mrs. Cruickshank, "I felt the same

way when I first . . ." Her voice broke off.

Cathryn glanced aside involuntarily and saw Mr. Cruickshank's head lower again over the gilt-edged plate. A slight shudder ran down her back. She pretended not to notice, picking up her delicate gold-rimmed wine glass in a shaky hand.

"The steak is delicious," she said, putting down the glass. Mrs. Cruickshank nodded and smiled weakly. Then it was silent except for the clink of silver on dishes and the tiny explosions of log bits



in the huge marble fireplace that stood at one end of the great dining room.

Cathryn looked at Gerald again.

His gaze was fixed on his plate. His jaws moved slowly and irregularly as though he were thinking and, at odd moments, drifted so far away that he forgot he was eating too.

Her mouth tightened as she watched his restive movements. She took a sip of water to clear her throat. I'm marrying him, she thought, not this house, not his parents. He's all right when his father isn't around.

She flushed a little as if her thoughts were audible to Mr. Cruickshank. She lowered her eyes and ate again. She felt the old man's eyes on her, and unconsciously, she drew her feet together under the chair. The grating of her heels on the smooth inlaid wood floor made Mr. Cruickshank's shoulders twitch.

She kept her eyes on her food. Stop looking at me like that, she thought, her mind snapping the words. Then, resolutely, she raised her eyes and looked at him. She saw the flesh on his right cheek pulsate for a moment. Her throat contracted.

"How high is the ceiling, Mr. Cruickshank?" she blurted out,

unable to face him in silence. She noticed his shirt, as snowy white as the table cloth, the impeccably set bow tie standing out against it like a complementary pair of jet black triangles. She put her shaking hands in her lap for a moment. I couldn't call him Father if I lived a million years, she thought.

"Mmm?" Mr. Cruickshank finally grunted. You heard me! her mind cried out.

"How high is the ceiling?" she asked with a trembling smile.

"Seventy-five feet," he said as though reading off the measurement to a surveyor.

She glanced up as if checking, glad to avoid his pale blue eyes and the sight of the tie which sprang in his cheek like a tiny imprisoned insect.

Her eyes ran up the tapestried walls, past the high, wide-paned windows, to the dark curving beams that arched to the ceiling. Gerald take me away, she thought, I can't go on with this. I can't.

"Seventy-five," she said, "My."

Mr. Cruickshank was no longer watching her. Nor was his wife. Only Gerald's eyes met her's as she looked down. They looked at each other a moment. Don't be afraid; she seemed to see the message in his look.

She began to eat again, unable

## INTEREST

to keep the trembling from her hands. What is it about this house, she wondered. I can't help feeling it isn't me. It's the house. It's too big. Everything about it is too big. And there's something else about it. Something I can't explain. But I feel it. I feel it every second.

She glanced up at the two giant chandeliers that hung over their heads like great bracelets of glowing gold nuggets. Involuntarily her eyes moved to the length of marble wall between the top of the tapestried panels and the bottom of the windows.

Deer heads, she thought with a shudder, lowering her gaze quickly; a row of decapitations looking down at us while we eat. And, on the floor, what's left of a grizzly bear, staring up, mouth gaping in a forever snarl.

She closed her eyes, the feeling swelling up in her again. It's the house, the house, she thought.

When she opened her eyes, after a moment, Gerald was looking at her, his lean mouth set concernedly. Are you all right? he asked soundlessly, with his lips.

She smiled at him, wanting to run around the table and hold on to him forever. Oh God, don't look at me like that, she begged in her mind, not with such pity

and anguish in your eyes. I need strength now, not looks of unhappiness.

She started violently, her heart thudded against her chest as Mr. Cruickshank cleared his throat and put down his silver. He leaned back in the chair, his eyes running imperiously down the length of the table.

Abruptly, Mrs. Cruickshank put down her silverware and sat rigidly. Gerald put his down too, and looked over at Cathryn, his face a mask of sudden pain. She didn't understand. She glanced at his father.

Mr. Cruickshank sat waiting, his lean blue-veined hands planted on each knee. He stared ahead as though he sat alone. Cathryn felt her stomach muscles tighten. She put down her silver quietly and sat staring at the row of white candles jutting out from the shining silver centerpiece.

Mr. Cruickshank raised one half-palsied hand then and wrapped the fingers of it around a crown-topped silver bell. He shook it precisely, twice, as though to ring it more or less would profane a ritual.

The high jingle echoed in the long room. Oh my God, this is so ridiculous, Cathryn thought, are we at dinner or at worship?

She looked at Mrs. Cruickshank, at Gerald. They sat mutely. Gerald was looking at his father with a look of tight bitterness marring his features.

Before the sound of the bell had died, the thick oak door which led to the kitchen opened noiselessly and the two maids came filing in silently. As they took away the main course, Cathryn watched Gerald.

He was bolding one blood-drained fist against his chin. She could sense the endless unrest in him. I've never seen him like this before, she thought. Not so upset.

She shifted on the red plush chair as a maid set the tall dish of ice before her.

She kept her head down as she ate, wishing that Gerald would say something, anything. The ice made her shiver as it slid wetly down her throat and into her stomach.

"Too cold," muttered Mr. Cruickshank.

She glanced aside with a questioning look on her face. Mr. Cruickshank was staring at the table cloth. His colorless lips were pursed as he ran the ice around his mouth to take off the chill before swallowing it.

As she watched him, she suddenly wanted to throw back the

chair, jump up and run away as far as she could. She shivered.

Again Mr. Cruickshank cleared his throat. Cathryn started and her spoon clinked loudly against the dish. Mrs. Cruickshank smiled in vague pleasantness.

The bell again. She sat primly. The maids entered with the butler following.

"Coffee in the library," specified Mr. Cruickshank abruptly. His heavy chair grated back on the floor, setting Cathryn's teeth on edge. She noticed how the old man's body wavered as he stood.

Gerald was up and around the table. He helped her up and she clung gratefully to his arm.

"You've been fine," he said quietly. "Just fine."

She didn't say anything. She kept her hand on his arm as they walked across the wide room to the hall.

In silence, they crossed the great hall. The click of their footsteps seemed lost in its immensity. Cathryn glanced up the long wide staircase with the gold-framed oil paintings hung along its length.

"Do you . . ." she started and then stopped when she saw Gerald wasn't listening. He was staring ahead at his father, his face pale and absorbed in thought. She looked at him as she might view

## INTEREST

a stranger. *What is it?* Her mind asked it again and again.

She looked around the hall and felt fear creeping over her. She wanted to shrink, draw into herself, away from the very walls. There's something terrible about it. She was sure of it. Something hidden from her mind as knowledge but not as trembling premonition.

As they entered the library another thought jolted her. Was it possible that his parents were against the marriage now? After they'd given their word?

What am I doing to myself, she thought. I'm just making this up. All of it.

Gerald turned and looked at her and she realized she'd been staring at him all the time she was thinking.

"What is it Cathryn?" he asked.

"Darling, you're so quiet."

He smiled sadly and pressed her hand in his.

"Am I?" he said, "I'm sorry. It's . . . well I'll tell you after. I . . ." He finished in a whisper as they approached his parents.

There were heavy chairs and couches arranged before the fireplace. Mr. Cruickshank's sparse frame was on a couch. His wife was getting settled on a nearby chair.

Mr. Cruickshank patted the couch beside him.

"Sit here, Cathryn," he said.

She sat down nervously. She could smell the clean starchiness of his shirt and the pomade he had on his thin grey hair.

She tried not to shiver. Heat waves from the fireplace played against her legs. She glanced up. Another seventy-five foot ceiling, she thought. And books, millions of them. Shadowy marble busts peering down glumly from the tops of book cases. The ceiling covered with a gigantic green-tinted painting. All around, she could see the shapes of fresh tropic plants sticking out of their huge pots, the leaves like sharpened green knives.

"You are 25, Cathryn," said Mr. Cruickshank. It was only half question.

She folded her hands. "Yes." Her throat contracted and she waited for more questions. First dinner with my fiance's parents, she thought. She waited tensely.

But Mr. Cruickshank said nothing more. From the corner of an eye she noticed his gaunt fingers drumming restlessly on a knee cap.

"Father, I . . ." Gerald suddenly started to say. His voice broke off as the door opened behind him

and the hutler entered carrying a tray.

The night will never end, Cathryn thought as the hutler proffered the tray toward her. She took a cup of coffee. She poured a little cream from the silver pitcher, put a half teaspoon of sugar in the cup and stirred as quietly as she could.

Mr. Cruickshank was sipping the black coffee without cream or sugar. The cup rattled a little on the saucer while he held it. Cathryn tried hard not to hear it. She tried to concentrate on the popping splutter of the fire. But she kept hearing the slight jiggling of the cup and saucer that the old man held.

She looked at Gerald, then at his mother. They were both staring into their coffee. Her muscles tightened suddenly. I don't know why I'm so afraid, she thought. Afraid of his father and his mother and his house. It's terrible to be afraid of everything that's a part of him but I can't help it. I want him to take me far away from them.

Again, she looked at Gerald. Something was rising in him. Like a fanned fire. She could tell it. She sat waiting, knowing that something was going to happen, that he would speak or shout or hurl his cup on the floor. Her

throat moved as he put down his cup and ran the edge of his tongue quickly over his lips. She waited tensely, her hands trembling. She realized she wasn't breathing and the room seemed to have whirled away except for Gerald sitting there.

Then as the moments passed, she noticed the marble bust behind him in the distance. *The marble bust of Pallas just above my chamber door*, her mind ranted inately. *And with many and flirt and . . .*

"Father," Gerald said quickly and her eyes were riveted on his face. He was sitting on the edge of the chair, hands pressed together in his lap.

She felt numb, waiting for Mr. Cruickshank's answer.

"Gerald," he said and, taking a sudden breath, Cathryn put down her cup and saucer with nervous fingers.

Gerald stared at his father. Oh my God, *speak!* her mind cried out.

"I . . . I think," Gerald said falteringly, "I think that Cathryn has a right to know. Before we're married."

There was silence for a horrible moment. Then Mr. Cruickshank said, "Know?" His voice was cold. She glanced at him and was re-

## INTEREST

volted and frightened by the twitching under his right eye.

She looked away and noticed how pale Gerald's mother had become. She was looking fearfully at her son.

Gerald clenched his fists. "You know what I mean," he said, "About . . ."

"That will do," said his father in a threatening tone.

Gerald was silent. He pressed his lips together. Then suddenly he drove one fist against his leg.

"No!" he said, all the withheld nerves exploding in his voice, "I'm not going to shock her as mother was . . ."

"I said that will do!"

Mr. Cruickshank's voice was rising and shrill. Cathryn felt the couch cushion move as the old man lurched forward and back with a spasmodic movement.

Gerald stood up quickly, his face taut. He turned and started toward one end of the room.

"Gerald, no!" cried his mother, starting half to her feet. She stumbled, righted herself and hurried after her son. She caught his sleeve. Cathryn watched in astonishment, hearing the shaking urgency in Mrs. Cruickshank's voice.

Mr. Cruickshank stood up.

"This is no concern of yours," he said hastily. "It's not as important as it seems." She avoided his

eyes and heard his black shoes moving rapidly over the rug.

She raised her eyes and watched the three of them standing at the end of the room. Gerald was gesturing rapidly, seemingly unable to control himself. His movements were erratic. His voice broke often as he spoke. Three times he made a move for the bookcase of red leather volumes at his side. Three times his father restrained him.

"No!" his voice billowed up in fury, "I won't ask it of her. You had no right to . . ."

The voices became muffled again. She turned away and stared at the fire, her teeth chattering. What is it, what is it? She wanted to scream the question at them. It was unnerving her not to know but to feel it every second.

What was the terrible menace that filled the very air of the house? Why did Gerald always seem to have this fear in him and terribly so in his own home?

No, she thought. It was worse than fear. It was like a deep corroding sense of guilt. Guilt like a never healing wound, self-broken open after every healing.

Guilt. For what?

"For what?" she muttered and, even when she struggled, the words were louder than she meant them to be. She glanced around hurried-

ly to make sure they didn't hear. Her hands twisted in anguish.

They came back. She listened to the thud of their feet across the rug.

"I'll take you home," Gerald said quietly. She looked up at his impassive face. Mrs. Cruickshank touched his arm but he pulled away. Cathryn stood up nervously and took the arm he offered to her stiffly.

They started out of the room. She heard Mr. Cruickshank say something to his wife in an irritated voice. I don't ever want to come back here, Cathryn thought angrily. I hate the place. It's big and ugly and unfriendly. And what about the people who live in it? asked her mind. She ignored the question.

Gerald helped her on with her coat. She didn't look at him. She kissed Mrs. Cruickshank's cool cheek. She shook Mr. Cruickshank's hand. I hate your house, she was thinking.

"Thank you for having me," she said. "It was lovely."

"We're so glad you could come," Gerald's mother said. Her husband nodded.

She and Gerald walked down the long path to his car. Once she looked back over her shoulder but the door had been closed.

They got into the car without a

word. Inside, Gerald sat staring out through the windshield. She heard his heavy breathing in the darkness.

"Darling, what is it?" she asked.

He turned slowly and faced her. Suddenly he pulled her close to him and pressed his face against her soft hair.

She stroked his cheek. "Tell me," she asked.

"How . . . how can I ask you to marry me?" he said.

She swallowed, feeling herself grow cold.

"Don't you love me?" she asked in a thin frightened voice.

He kissed her and clung to her desperately.

"You know I love you," he said. "But you don't know what I'm asking you. What you'd be marrying into. The . . . the evil."

"Evil?" she repeated.

He pulled away from her. He looked out the windshield at the far off sky.

"Yes," he said. "And I can't ask you to . . . live with it."

"You love me?"

"Yes. Of course I love you."

"Then nothing else matters."

"It *does*," he said, his voice angry. "You don't know what you're saying. Don't be silly and romantic. It does matter. My father may say it doesn't. My mother

## INTEREST

may say so. But it matters. It will always matter."

He reached over quickly and turned on the motor. He jerked down the gear shift and the car started around the wide elliptical drive. Gerald turned it sharply on to the road.

"I'm taking you home," he said harshly, "I'm not going to marry you."

She jolted on the seat and stared at him. She couldn't speak. Her body felt heavy and numb.

"What?" she murmured but she couldn't even hear it herself.

The dark woods flew by. She kept looking at his black outline, at the deep shadows of his face created by the minute glow from the dashboard. Her hands shook.

"Gerald," she said.

He didn't answer. She drew in a ragged breath and felt a tear run down her cheek.

"You . . . you have to tell me why," she said, "You . . ."

A sob caught her throat and she turned her head away.

"Listen, Cathryn," he said. His voice was hollow and he sounded lost. He sounded as if he were saying goodbye forever.

"Just listen to me. Love isn't enough. Believe me. My mother loved and still loves my father. But it isn't enough. You don't know what it is. You couldn't pos-

sibly. And I don't want you to know. I don't want you to ever have to know. To have to live with it, day after day, hour by hour, every minute without end. It's too terrible."

"But . . ."

"No. Listen to me, darling. My mother pretends it's in the past. She says it's over and done with. But I've heard her wake screaming in the night. God, how many times! And I've watched my father pretend that life was going on as usual and there was nothing wrong. And all the time it's killing him. He's pretending and living like a satisfied rich man and it's killing him."

"What? What, Gerald?"

He jammed his foot on the brake and the car jolted to a halt. She gasped and looked in fright at him. She caught her breath as his hand took hers, cold and shaking.

"All right," he said, "I'm going to show you. It will be fair that way. Then you'll know and you can decide. There'll be no secrets. Then you can see how you'd be trapped by marrying me."

"Trapped, Gerald?" she said miserably.

"Yes," he said, starting the car. He turned it and started back.

"It's our . . . money," he said.

"Your . . ."

"Our money. Oh, I know what



you'll say. I've heard it so many times. It's not my father's responsibility, not mine, for what our ancestors did. The sins of the fathers and all that. Well, it's a lie. A lie."

He kept his eyes on the road, his foot pressing down on the accelerator.

"But darling, how can you . . ."

"Will you wait!" he almost cried. Then he forced calm into his voice.

"I'm sorry," he said, "Just wait. Please, Cathryn."

The car moved into the driveway and stopped silently before the house.

"Don't slam the door," Gerald said.

"Maybe I'd better not go in," she said.

She shivered as he pressed her hand in the darkness.

"Cathryn, it's this way or no way. If you don't come in now, there'll be no other time. I'll take you home and we'll never see each other again."

"All right," she said, "I'll go in."

She closed the door as quietly as she could. In the hallway of the house she stood timidly while Gerald relocked the front door.

He took her hand and led her quickly to the darkened library. Their footsteps rustled over the thick rug. From the fireplace a

quivering golden layer extended over the floor. Cathryn's throat contracted. She could feel the bugeness and the hostility of the room about her.

They stood before the bookcase. She heard him pull open the door. Then the sound of books being withdrawn. She moved closer.

In the dim light from the fireplace she saw his white fingers moving on a safe dial.

She turned away. She heard the safe door open and the scrape of something being drawn out. She flinched as he took hold of her arm. She kept her eyes shut as he led her to the couch in front of the fireplace.

They sat down and he put the object in her lap.

"You mustn't show me," she said suddenly.

"Do you want to marry me?" he asked.

"Must I know?" He said nothing and she put her hands on the object. She looked at it. It was a dark wood box.

She ran her hands numbly over its surface. The blood pounded through her as she reached over and unlocked it. She felt paralyzed.

"Open it," he said quietly, his voice trembling.

She lifted one shaking hand and opened the top. She took a deep

## INTEREST

breath and looked inside. She stared.

"This is where it came from." His voice was like a thought in her brain.

Her brow knitted. She reached into the box. By the flickering

light she looked at what she held in her hand. She turned to him.

"But," she said, "This is only . . ."

"Silver," he said, his dark eyes wide and staring, "Count them. *There are thirty places.*"

γ



As anyone will tell you who has not written a story, it is a simple thing to do. You just put a sheet of paper in a typewriter and let the words flow. The result is a story which reads as though it wrote itself.

As anyone will tell you who has written a story, it is not quite that simple. There are usually many revisions, editings, and rewritings necessary in order to make a story appear as though there were little effort involved in its creation.

The following is such a gem. It is a simple, uncomplicated story that illustrates another truth: the horror of a situation lies not in what is said — but in what is not said.

## LULLABY AND GOODNIGHT

*George Clayton Johnson*

In the morning the men went down to the city to rummage through the rubble. I straightened up around the shelter, filled a water bottle from the rain barrel, got the hoe and went down to the field.

We'd managed to salvage some wheat seed and a little corn. None of us there at Outpost had much faith that we'd get a crop but we did the best we could anyhow. Radiation had played some disheartening tricks on most growing things.

Standing there, looking up the hill toward Outpost, I thought for

a moment I could hear the Hartman baby crying but just then the wind shifted and I wasn't sure. I went along the rows loosening up the dirt for a couple of hours. It was tiring and lonely. Seems like none of us has any real strength to speak of any more. Occasionally I'd see a clump of wild grass or a weed stalk. Even these were often warped or different, not bright green like I remember but sort of brown looking and tired. I was mighty careful not to cut any of it down.

Along about ten o'clock I finished. I drank some of the water,

## LULLABY AND GOODNIGHT

and carrying the hoe and the bottle I walked back up the hill.

When I reached the upper path I could see the Hartman shelter. Sarah Hartman was out front hanging up some diapers. She saw me but went on with her work. I tell you, it did something to me to see her there, so thin against the sky. Sarah was one of the first ones up at Outpost. With her husband, Howard, she did a lot in helping put up the shelters and lay out the settlement. When she got pregnant we held a little celebration. We broke out some of the canned goods that the men had dug up down in the city and all gathered together in the compound. We sang some of the old songs.

Along about then Sarah became the most important person at Outpost. Nobody would let her do any work and we all made sure she had the best food. When we planted seed we carried her down to watch. I guess we figured she'd bring us luck. Through it all she was just about the most cheerful person in the settlement. Along in her sixth month her legs and feet swelled up. It was hard for her to get around but she kept that contented look on her face.

I guess Howard was the proudest man around. With all the work he was doing he never seemed to

get too tired to fetch and carry for Sarah. Everybody pitched in to help her make clothes for the baby. Sometimes in the evening you could hear her singing. The song she sang most was that one that goes: "Lullaby, and good-night . . ."

In spite of everything the baby came early. Sarah never cried out once. Everybody was standing around outside the shelter waiting to hear the news and it was a joyful moment when we heard the baby cry. It was a boy, the first baby born at Outpost. Howard had to come out and tell us to hush so the baby could sleep. It was the rosiest baby you'd ever want to see. Nobody was surprised when Sarah named it Adam. After that you could hear the Lullaby every night if you listened close.

Sarah's milk went dry the second month and it became harder to feed the baby. The men took to making more frequent trips down to the city looking for food, tools and building materials. Sometimes they were lucky but not often. One time they found two cases of condensed milk that the rats hadn't got to. One of the cases was radiation contaminated but the other one was good. It helped out a lot. Another time they found one wall of a schoolhouse intact

with window glass and frames. It took two days with all of us helping to move the windows up on the hill but we made it without breaking them.

Then last month little Adam, the baby, started getting sickly. At first we thought it was his food. We borrowed a doctor from Three Mile Settlement down river. He came up and gave the baby an examination. It seemed something was wrong with the baby's blood cells. He said he wasn't sure seeing as he didn't have enough equipment to do an analysis but from what he could tell the baby's red corpuscle count was low. He gave us a list of things to feed the baby but from the way he talked we got the feeling it wouldn't do much good.

At first the baby cried a lot, then as it grew weaker it stopped crying. We used to go over to the Hartman shelter to watch it. Sarah had fixed up a crib out of some old blankets she had boiled and it was a saddening sight to see little Adam laying there wrapped up in the baby clothes we had all made. He was pale and listless. His skin was kind of waxy and he slept a lot. When he was awake it was hard to get his attention. His eyes didn't seem to have the strength to focus. After a few min-

utes, Sarah would run us all off. Later we'd hear her singing the lullaby.

I came up to her just as she finished with the diapers. When she turned around it was as though she saw me for the first time. It didn't seem to startle her none but from the look in her eyes you could tell her mind was a million miles away. She'd aged since the last time I saw her yesterday. She had on a pair of jeans and a man's sweater. She pushed the sleeves of the sweater up on her thin wrists.

"Hello, Sarah," I said. "How's the baby?"

"He cried a little bit a while ago," she said. "Sometimes I think he's getting better. I had him out in the sun for a few minutes this morning. It seemed to help."

I leaned the hoe against the shelter.

"I heated up some hroth a while ago. Would you like some?"

We went inside. Sarah stirred up the coals in the fireplace and set up the grill. I went over to Adam's crib and looked in. He was lying on his back. His eyes were closed. I arranged the coverlet over him and turned back to Sarah.

"The men ought to be getting back soon," she said.

## LULLABY AND GOODNIGHT

"Maybe they'll find some food or medicine this time," I said. "They were talking about going in as far as the old Overpass. If I remember right there was a big hospital in that area."

She shrugged, "All we can do is wait and see."

"It doesn't stand to reason that everything was covered up. Remember the time Howard found that basement where the shoes were stored? Must have been a hundred pairs of shoes still usable."

"Yes," she said.

But I could tell that she was thinking the same thing I was. Medicines can't take the same radiation that shoeleather can.

About that time the baby woke up. It made a soft mewling sound and we went over to the crib. The baby had a distressed look on his tiny face. His body was rigid. Sarah bent over and picked him up. He squirmed feebly, and couldn't seem to get his breath. She held him on her shoulder and patted his back. His pale face began to get blue. I guess we both knew what was wrong. His red cells had finally gotten tired of carrying oxygen and he was smothering to death. We worked over him for a few minutes trying every way we could think of to help him breathe, but it didn't do any

good. It was over in a few minutes. Sarah held him against her breast, standing there, rocking back and forth for a long time, then she carried him back to the crib and tucked him in. Then she turned around and crossed to the fireplace. She took the pan of broth off the grill and put it on the table. Then she sat down. I tried to imagine how she felt, and couldn't.

"Is there anything I can do?" I asked.

At first I thought she didn't hear me. She just sat there looking way off.

At last she looked at me.

I started to repeat the question but I could tell that she wasn't listening to me. She had heard the first time.

"No," she said. "I don't guess there's anything anybody can do now. It's too late. I'd appreciate it if you would sit here with me till Howard gets back. I feel all numb. I know that the baby's dead, but somehow it hasn't really hit me. You know what I mean?"

"I know," I said softly. "I know."

"It will sink in later," she said. "Maybe it'll happen today. Somebody will say something or maybe I'll do something . . . some little act that I've done a hundred times before that will remind me.

It will hit me then but right now  
I'm all right.

We sat still for a few minutes  
looking at the baby's crib.

And then, so soft you could  
hardly hear it at first, she started  
to hum. She had a far off look in  
her eyes. The lines in her face  
seemed to smooth out and that  
contented look came back.

She rocked back and forth on  
the chair humming and humming.  
And at last she sang the words.

"Lay thee down now and rest,  
May thy slumber be blest.  
Lay thee down now and rest,  
May thy slumber be blest."

Then she went out to bring in  
the diapers for the last time.



# A Rogue's Guide to Europe

By JACK MATCHA, bachelor newspaperman and  
international sophisticate. The first, no-holds-  
barred guide to the wildest, warmest, "womenest"  
places in Europe. A natural for playboys, play-  
girls (who will want to know where the boys are  
going) and broad-minded armchair travelers.  
May, \$4.94

**BERNARD GEIS ASSOCIATES** 130 EAST 56TH STREET, NEW YORK 22, NEW YORK  
Distributed by Random House

A recent issue of SHOW Magazine featured an interview with Ray Bradbury entitled *A Portrait of Genius*. This is a description science-fiction fans and other discerning readers have known to be accurate for a long time, and they've testified to this fact by snapping up over six million copies of his works during the past seventeen years.

His genius has led him in many directions: as an editor of anthologies; as a writer of short stories, novels, children's books, television and movies. The latest field in which he has chosen to excel is the theater. He is executive producer of *The World of Ray Bradbury* — three of his one-act plays: *The Veldt*, *The Pedestrian*, and *To The Chicago Abyss* — which has been enjoying months of SRO business at the Coronet Theater in Los Angeles.

Ray is known primarily as a science-fiction writer, but actually he is difficult to categorize. Even the specialized magazines don't bother, as evidenced by the fact he has non-fantasy stories in fantasy magazines and fantasy stories in non-fantasy magazines. If any classification can be applied to his writing, it is offbeat and imaginative. The following story is no exception.

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

*Ray Bradbury*

You sleep only four hours a night. You go to bed at eleven and get up at three and everything is clear as crystal. You begin your day then, have your coffee, read a book for an hour, listen to the faint, far, unreal talk and music of the pre-dawn stations and per-

haps go out for a walk, always being certain to have your special police permit with you. You have been picked up before for late and unusual hours and it got to be a nuisance, so you finally got yourself a special permit. Now you can walk and whistle where

Copyright 1946 by New Detective Magazine.  
Reprinted by permission of the author.



you wish, hands in your pockets, heels striking the pavement in a slow, easy tempo.

This has been going on since you were sixteen years old. You're now twenty-five, and four hours a night is still enough sleep.

You have few glass objects in your house. You shave with an electric razor, because a safety razor sometimes cuts you and you cannot afford to bleed.

You are a hemophiliac. You start bleeding and you can't stop. Your father was the same way — though he served only as a frightening example. He cut his finger once, fairly deeply, and died on the way to the hospital from lack of blood. There was also hemophilia on your mother's side of the family, and that was where you got it.

In your right inside coat pocket you carry, always, a small bottle of coagulant tablets. If you cut yourself you immediately swallow them. The coagulant formula spreads through your system to supply the necessary clotting material to stop the seepage of blood.

So this is how your life goes. You need only four hours sleep and you stay away from sharp objects. Each waking day of your life is almost twice as long as the average man's but your life expectan-

cy is short, so it comes to an ironic balance.

It will be long hours until the morning mail. So you tap out four thousand words on a story with your typewriter. At nine o'clock when the postal box in front of your door clicks you stack the typewritten sheets, clip them together, check the carbon copy and file them under the heading NOVEL IN PROGRESS. Then, smoking a cigarette, you go for the mail.

You take the mail from the box. A check for three hundred dollars from a national magazine, two rejections from lesser houses, and a small cardboard box tied with green string.

After shuffling over the letters you turn to the box, untie it, flip open the top, reach in and pull out the thing that is inside it.

"Damn!"

You drop the box. A splash of quick red spreads on your fingers. Something bright has flashed in the air with a chopping movement. There was the whir of a metal spring, whining.

Blood begins to run smoothly, swiftly from your wounded hand. You stare at it for a moment, stare at the sharp object on the floor, the little bestial contraption with the razor bedded in a sprung

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

trap that clipped shut when you pulled it out, and caught you un-awares!

Fumbling, trembling, you reach into your pocket, getting blood all over yourself, and pull out the bottle of tablets and gulp several down.

Then, while you are waiting for the stuff to clot, you wrap the hand in a handkerchief and, gingerly, pick up the contraption and set it on the table.

After staring at it for ten minutes you sit down and have yourself a cigarette clumsily, and your eyelids jerk and flicker and your vision melts and hardens and remelts the objects of the room, and finally you have the answer.

*... Someone doesn't like me  
... Someone doesn't like me at all ...*

The phone rings. You get it.

"Douglas speaking."

"Hello, Rob. This is Jerry."

"Oh, Jerry."

"How are you, Rob?"

"Pale and shaken."

"How come?"

"Somebody sent me a razor in a box."

"Stop kidding."

"Seriously. But you wouldn't want to hear."

"How's the novel, Rob?"

"I won't ever finish it if people

keep sending me sharp objects. I expect to get a cut-glass Swedish vase in the next mail. Or a magician's cabinet with a large collapsible mirror."

"Your voice sounds funny," says Jerry.

"It should. As for the novel, Gerald, it is going great guns. I've just done another four thousand words. In this scene I show the great love of Anne J. Anthony for Mr. Michael M. Horn."

"You're asking for trouble, Rob."

"I have discovered that only this minute."

Jerry mutters something.

You say, "Mike wouldn't touch me, directly, Jerry. Neither would Anne. After all, Anne and I were once engaged. That was before I found out about what they were doing. The parties they were giving, the needles they were giving people, full of morphine."

"They might try to stop the book, though, somehow."

"I believe you. They already have. This box that came in the mail. Well, maybe they didn't do it, but one of the other people, some of the others I mention in the book, they might take a notion."

"Have you talked to Anne recently?" asks Jerry.

"Yes," you say.

"And she still prefers that kind of life?"

"It's a wild one. You see a lot of pretty pictures when you take some kinds of narcotic."

"I wouldn't believe it of her; she doesn't look that sort."

"It's your Oedipus complex Jerry. Women never seem like females to you. They seem like bathed, flowered, sexless ivory carvings on rococo pedestals. You loved your mother too completely. Luckily I'm more ambivalent. Anne had me fooled for a while. But she was having so much fun one night and I thought she was drunk, and then first thing I knew she was kissing me and pressing a little needle into my hand and saying, 'Come on, Rob, please. You'll like it.' And the needle was as full of morphine as Anne was."

"And that was that," says Jerry on the other end of the line.

"That was that," you say. "So I've talked to the police and the State Bureau of Narcotics, but there's a fumble somewhere and they're afraid to move. Either that or they're being handsomely paid. A little of both, I suspect. There's always someone somewhere in any one system who clogs the pipe. In the police department there's always one guy who'll take a little money on the side and spoil

the good name of the force. It's a fact. You can't get away from it. People are human. So am I. If I can't clean the clog in the pipe one way, I'll clean it another. This novel of mine, needless to say, will be what will do it."

"You might go down the drain with it, Rob. Do you really think your novel will shame the narcotics boys into acting?"

"That's the idea."

"Won't you be sued?"

"I've taken care of that. I'm signing a paper with my publishers absolving them of any blame, saying that all characters in this novel are fictitious. Thus, if I've lied to the publishers they are blameless. If I'm sued, the royalties from the novel will be used in my defense. And I've got plenty of evidence. Incidentally, it's a corking good novel."

"Seriously, Rob. Did someone send you a razor in a box?"

"Yes, and there lies my greatest danger. Rather thrilling. They wouldn't dare kill me outright. But if I died of my own natural carelessness and my inherited blood makeup, who would blame them? They wouldn't slit my throat, that'd be somewhat obvious. But a razor, or a nail, or the edge of the steering wheel of my car fixed and set with knife blades

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

... it's all very melodramatic. How goes it with your novel, Jerry?"

"Slow. How's about lunch today?"

"Fair enough. The Brown Derby?"

"You sure ask for trouble. You know damn well Anne eats there every day with Mikel."

"Stimulates my appetite, Gerald, old man. See you."

You bang up. Your hand is okay now. You whistle as you bandage it in the bathroom. Then you give the little razor contraption a going over. A primitive thing. The chances were hardly fifty-fifty it would even work.

You sit down and write three thousand more words, stimulated by the early morning events.

The handle of the door to your car has been filed, sharpened to a razor edge during the night. Dripping blood, you return to the house for more bandages. You gulp pills. The bleeding stops.

After you deposit the two new chapters of the book in your safety deposit box at the bank you drive and meet Jerry Walters at the Brown Derby. He looks as electric and small as ever, dark-jowled, his eyes popping behind his thick-lensed glasses.

"Anne's inside," he grins at you.

"And Mike's with her. Why do we wanna eat here, I ask?" His grin dries and he stares at you, at your band. "You need a drink! Right this way. There's Anne at that table over there. Nod to her."

"I'm nodding."

You watch Anne, at a corner table, in a monk's cloth sport dress, interwoven with gold and silver thread, a link of Aztec jewelry in bronze units around her tan neck. Her hair is the same bronze color. Beside her, behind a cigar and a haze of smoke, is the rather tall, spare figure of Michael Horn, who looks just like what he is, gambler, narcotics specialist, sensualist par excellence, lover of women, ruler of men, wearer of diamonds and silk undershorts. You would not want to shake hands with him. That manicure looks too sharp.

You sit down to a salad. You are eating it when Anne and Mike come by the table, after their cocktail. "Hello, sharpster," you say to Mike Horn, with a little emphasis on the latter word.

Behind Horn is his bodyguard, a young twenty-two-year old kid from Chicago named Britz, with a carnation in his black coat lapel and his black hair greased, and his eyes sewed down by little muscles at the corners, so he looks sad.

"Hello, Rob, darling," says Anne. "How's the book?"

"Fine, fine. I've got a swell new chapter on you, Anne."

"Thank you, darling."

"When you going to leave this big beel-beaded leprechaun?" you ask her, not looking at Mike.

"After I kill him," says Anne.

Mike laughs. "That's a good one. Now let's get going, baby. I'm tired of this jerk."

You upset some cutlery. Somehow a lot of dishes fall. You almost hit Mike. But Britz and Anne and Jerry gang you and so you sit down, the blood banging your ears, and people pick up the cutlery and hand it to you.

"So long," says Mike.

Anne goes out the door like a pendulum on a clock and you note the time. Mike and Britz follow.

You look at your salad. You reach for your fork. You pick at the stuff.

You take a forkful.

Jerry stares at you. "For God's sake, Rob, what's wrong?"

You don't speak. You take the fork away from your lips.

"What's wrong, Rob? Spit it out!"

You spit.

Jerry swears under his breath. Blood.

You and Jerry come down out of the Taft building and you are

now talking sign language. A wad of stuff is in your mouth. You smell of antiseptic.

"But I don't see bow," says Jerry. You gesture with your hands. "Yeah, I know, the fight in the Derby. The fork gets knocked on the floor." You gesture again. Jerry supplies the explanation to the pantomime. "Mike, or Britz, picks it up, hands it back to you, but instead slips you a fixed, sharpened fork."

You nod your head, violently, flushing.

"Or maybe it was Anne," says Jerry.

No, you shake your head. You try to explain in pantomime that if Anne knew about this she'd quit Mike cold. Jerry doesn't get it and peers at you through his thick goggles. You sweat.

A tongue is a bad place for a cut. You knew a guy once who had a cut tongue and the wound never healed, even though it stopped bleeding. And imagine with a hemopilliac!

You gesture now, forcing a smile as you climb into your car. Jerry squints, thinks, gets it. "Oh," he laughs. "You mean to say, all you need now is a stab in the back-side?"

You nod, shake hands, drive off. Suddenly, life is not so funny

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

any more. Life is real. Life is stuff that comes out of your veins at the least invitation. Unconsciously, your hand goes again and again to your coat pocket where the tablets are hidden. Good old tablets.

It is about now you notice you are being followed.

You turn left at the next corner and you're thinking fast. An accident. Yourself knocked out and bleeding. Unconscious, you'll never be able to give yourself a dose of those precious little pills you keep in your pocket.

You press the gas pedal. The car thunders ahead and you look back and the other car is still following you, gaining. A tap on the head, the least cut and you are all done.

You turn right at Wilcox, left again when you reach Melrose but they are still with you. There is only one thing to do.

You stop the car at the curb, take the keys, climb quietly out and walk up and sit down on somebody's lawn.

As the trailing car passes, you smile and wave at them.

You think you hear curses as the car vanishes.

You walk the rest of the way home. On the way you call a ga-

rage and have them pick up your car for you.

Though you've always been alive, you've never been as alive as you are now — you'll live forever. You're smarter than all of them put together. You're watchful. They won't be able to do a thing that you can't see and circumvent one way or another. You have that much faith in yourself. You can't die. Other people die, but not you. You have complete faith in your ability to live. There'll never be a person clever enough to kill you.

You can eat flame, catch cannonballs, kiss women who have torches for lips, chuck gangsters under the chin. Being the way you are, with the kind of blood you have in your body, has made you — a gambler? A taker of chances? There must be some way to explain the morbid craving you have for danger or near-danger. Well, explain it this way. You get a terrific ego-lift out of coming through each experience safely. Admit it, you're a conceited, self-satisfied person with morbid ideas of self-destruction. Hidden ideas, naturally. No one admits outwardly he wants to die, but it's in there somewhere. Self-preservation and the will to die, tugging back and forth. The urge to die getting you

into messes, self-preservation yanking you out again. And you hate and laugh at these people when you see them wince and twist with discomfort when you come out, whole and intact. You feel superior, god-like, immortal. They are inferior, cowardly, common. And you are a little more than irked to think that Anne prefers her narcotics to you. She finds the needle more stimulating. Damn her! And yet — you also find her stimulation — and dangerous. But you'll take a chance with her, any time, yes, any old time . . .

It is once again four in the morning. The typewriter is going under your fingers as the doorbell rings. You get up and go to answer in the complete before-dawn quiet.

Far away on the other side of the universe her voice says, "Hello, Rob. Anne. Just get up?"

"Right. This is the first time you've come around in days, Anne." You open the door and she comes in past you, smelling good.

"I'm tired of Mike. He makes me sick. I need a good dose of Robert Douglas. I'm really tired, Rob."

"You sound it. My sympathies."

"Rob —" A pause.

"Yeah?"

"A pause. "Rob — could we get

away tomorrow? I mean, today — this afternoon. Up the coast somewhere, lie in the sun and just let it burn us? I need it, Rob, badly."

"Why, I guess so. Sure. Yeah. Hell, yes!"

"I like you, Rob. I only wish you weren't writing that damned novel."

"If you cleared out of that mob I might quit," you say. "But I don't like the things they've done to you. Has Mike told you what he's doing to me?"

"Is he doing something, darling?"

"He's trying to bleed me. *Really* bleed me, I mean. You know Mike underneath, don't you, Anne. White-livered and scared. Britz, Britz, too, for that matter. I've seen their kind before, acting tough to cover up their lily-guts. Mike doesn't want to kill me. He's afraid of killing. He thinks he can scare me out of this. But I'm going ahead because I don't think he'll have enough nerve to finish it. He'd rather take a chance on a narcotics rap than go up for murder. I know Mike."

"But do you know me, darling?"

"I think I do."

"Very well?"

"Well enough."

"I might kill you."

"You wouldn't dare. You like me."

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

"I like myself," she purrs, "too."

"You always were a strange one. I never knew and still don't know, what makes you tick."

"Self-preservation."

You offer her a cigarette. She is very near you. You nod wonderingly. "I saw you pull the wings off a fly once."

"It was interesting."

"Did you dissect bottled kittens in school?"

"With relish."

"Do you know what dope does to you?"

"I relish that, too."

"How about this?"

You are near enough so it takes only a move to bring your faces together. The lips are as good as they look. They are warm and moving and soft.

She holds you away a bit. "I relish this, also," she says.

You hold her against you, again the lips meet you and you shut your eyes . . .

"Dammit," you say, breaking away.

Her fingernail has bitten into your neck.

"I'm sorry, darling. Hurt you?" she asks.

"Everybody wants to get into the act," you say. You take out your favorite bottle and tap out a couple pills. "God, lady, what a

grip. Treat me kindly from now on, I'm tender."

"I'm sorry. I forgot myself," she says.

"That's very flattering. But if *this* is what happens when I kiss you, I'd be a bloody mess if I went any further. Wait."

More bandage on your neck. Out again to kiss her.

"Easy does it, baby. We'll take in the beach and I'll give you a lecture on the evils of running with Michael Horn."

"No matter what I say, you're going ahead with the novel, Rob?"

"Mind's made up. Where were we? Oh, yeah."

Again the lips.

You park the car atop a sun-blazed cliff a little after noon. Anne runs ahead, down the timber stairs, two hundred feet down the cliff. The wind lifts her bronze hair, she looks trim in her blue bathing suit. You follow, thoughtful. You are away from everywhere. Towns are gone, the highway empty. The beach below with the sea folding on it, is wide, barren, with big slabs of granite toppled and washed by breakers. Wading birds squeal. You watch Anne go down ahead of you. "What a little fool," you think, of her.

You saunter arm in arm and stand letting the sun get into you.



You believe everything is clean now, and good, for a while. All life is clean and fresh, even Anne's life. You want to talk, but your voice sounds funny in the salt silence and anyway your tongue is still sore from that sharp fork.

You wade by the water-line and Anne picks something up.

"A barnacle," she say. "Remember how you used to go diving with your rubber-rimmed helmet and trident, Butch? In the good old days?"

"The good old days." You think of the time past, Anne and yourself and the things that used to work out for you together. Traveling up the coast. Fishing. Diving. But even then she was a weird creature. Didn't mind killing lobsters at all. Took a relish in cleaning them.

"You used to be so foolhardy, Rob. You still are, in fact. Took chances diving for shalones when these barnacles might have cut you, badly. Sharp as razors."

"I know," you say.

She gives the barnacle a toss. It lands near your discarded shoes. As you come back up you skirt it, careful not to step on it.

"We could have been happy," she says.

"It's nice to think so, isn't it?"

"I wish you'd change your mind," she says.

"Too late," you say.

She sighs.

A wave comes in on the shore.

You are not afraid of being here with Anne. She can do nothing to you. You can handle her. You are confident of that. No, this will be an easy, lazy day, without event. You are alert, ready for any contingency.

You lie in the sun and it strikes through your bones and loosens you inside and you mould to the contours of the sand. Anne is beside you and the sun gilds her tippy nose and glitters across the minute pellets of perspiration on her brow. She talks gay talk and light talk and you are fascinated with her; how she can be so beautiful and like a hunk of serpentine thrown across your path, and be so mean and small somewhere hidden inside where you can't find it?

You lie upon your stomach and the sand is warm. The sun is warm.

"You're going to burn," she says at last, laughing.

"I suppose I am," you say. You feel very clever, very immortal.

"Here, let me put some oil on your back," she says, unfolding the shiny patent leather Chinese jigsaw of her purse. She holds up

## A CAREFUL MAN DIES

a bottle of pure yellow oil. "This'll get between you and the sun," she says. "Okay?"

"Okay," you say. You are feeling very good, verp superior.

She bastes you like a pig on a spit. The bottle is suspended over you and it comes down in a twine of liquid, yellow and glittering and cool to the small hollows of your spine. Her hand spreads it and massages it over your back. You lie, purring, eyes closed, watching the little blue and yellow bubbles dance across your shut eyelids, as she pours on more of the liquid and laughs as she massages you.

"I feel cooler already," you say.

She continues to massage you for a minute or more and then she stops and sits beside you quietly. A long time passes and you lie deep, baked in a sand oven, not wanting to move. The sun suddenly is not so hot.

"Are you ticklish?" asks Anne, behind your back.

"No," you say, your mouth turning up at the corners.

"You have a lovely back," she says. "I'd love to tickle it."

"Tickle away," you say.

"Are you ticklish here?" she asks.

You feel a distant, sleepy movement on your back.

"No," you say.

"Here?" she says.

You feel nothing. "You aren't even touching me," you say.

"I read a book once," she says. "It said that the sensory portions of the back are so poorly developed that most people couldn't tell exactly where they were being touched."

"Nuts," you say. "Touch me. Go ahead. I'll tell you."

You feel three long movements on your back.

"Well?" she asks.

"You tickled me down under one shoulderblade for a distance of five inches. Likewise under the other shoulderblade. And then right down my spine. So there."

"Smart boy. I quit. You're too good. I need a cigarette. Damn, I'm all out. Mind if I run up to the car and get some?"

"I'll go," you say.

"Never mind." She is off across the sand. You watch her run, lazily, sleepily, in patterns of rising hot atmosphere. You think it rather strange she is taking her purse and bottled liquid with her. Women. But all the same you cannot help but notice she is beautiful, running. She climbs up the wooden steps, turns and waves and smiles. You smile back, move your hand in a brief, lazy salute. "Hot?" she cries.

"I'm drenched," you cry back, lazily.

You feel the sweat crawling on your body. The heat is in you now and you sink down into it, as into a bath. You feel the sweat pouring down your back in torrents, faint and far away, like ants crawling on you. Sweat it out, you think. Sweat it all out. Streaks of sweat well down your ribs and along your stomach, tickling. You laugh. God, what a sweat. You never sweated like this before in your life. The smell of that oil Anne put on you is sweet in the warm air. Drowsy, drowsy.

You start. Your head yanks upward.

On top of the cliff, the car is started, put in gear, and now, as you watch, Anne waving to you, the car flashes in the sun, turns, and drives away down the highway.

Just like that.

"Why you little witch!" you cry irritably. You start to get up.

You can't. The sun has made you weak. Your head swims. Damn it. You've been sweating.

Sweating.

You smell something new on the hot air. Something as familiar and timeless as the salt smell of the sea. A hot, sweet, sickish odor. An odor that is all the terror in the

world to you and those of your kind. You cry out and stagger up.

You are wearing a cloak, a garment of scarlet. It clings to your thighs and, as you watch, it encases your loins and spreads and grows upon your legs and ankles. It is red. The reddest red in the color chart. The purest, loveliest, most terrible red you have ever seen, spreading and growing and pulsing along your body.

You clutch at your back. You mouth meaningless words. Your hands close upon three long open wounds cut into your flesh below the shoulderblades!

Sweat! You thought you were sweating. And it was blood! You lay there thinking it was sweat coming out of you, laughing about it, enjoying it!

You can feel nothing. Your fingers scrabble clumsily, weakly. Your back feels nothing. It is insensible.

"Here, let me put some oil on your back," says Anne, far away in the shimmering nightmare of your memory. "You're going to burn."

A wave crashes on the shore. In memory you see the long yellow twine of liquid pouring down on your back, suspended from Anne's lovely fingers. You feel her massaging you.

# A CAREFUL MAN DIES

Narcotic in solution. Novocaine or cocaine or something in a yellow solution that, after it clung to your back a while, deadened every nerve. Anne knows all about narcotics, doesn't she?

Sweet, sweet, lovely Anne.

"Are you ticklish?" asks Anne, in your mind again.

You retch. And echoing in your blood-red swimming mind, you give an answer: No. *Tickle away. Tickle away. Tickle away . . . Tickle away, Anne J. Anthony, lovely lady. Tickle away.*

With a nice sharp barnacle shell.

You were diving for abalones off shore and you scraped your back on a rock, in rough streaks, with a crop of razor-sharp barnacles. Yes, that's it. Diving. Accident. What a pretty set-up.

Sweet, lovely Anne.

*Or did you have your fingernails honed on a whetstone, my darling?*

The sun hangs in your brain. The sand is beginning to melt under you. You try to find the buttons to unbutton, to rip away this red garment. Senselessly, blindly, gropingly, you search for buttons. There are none. The garment stays. How silly, you think, foolishly. *How silly to be found in your long, red woolen underwear. How silly.*

There must be zippers somewhere. Those three long cuts can be zipped up tight and then that sliding red stuff will stop sliding out of you. You, the immortal man.

The cuts aren't too deep. If you can get to a doctor. If you can take your tablets.

*Tablets!*

You fall forward on your coat, and search one pocket and then another pocket, and then another, and turn it inside out, and rip the lining loose and shout and cry and four waves come pounding in on the shore behind you, like trains passing, roaring. And you go back through each empty pocket again, hoping that you have missed one. But there is nothing but lint, a box of matches and two theater ticket stubs. You drop the coat.

"Anne, come back!" you cry. "Come back! It's thirty miles to town, to a doctor. I can't walk it. I haven't time."

At the bottom of the cliff you look up. One hundred and fourteen steps. The cliff is sheer and blazing in the sun.

There is nothing to be done but climb the steps.

*Thirty miles to town, you think. Well, what is thirty miles?*

What a splendid day for a walk!

Steve Allen is the pen name for a writer, actor, musician, television comedian and master-of-ceremonies whose real name is Steve Allen.

## THE LATE MR. ADAMS

*Steve Allen*

Mr. Adams, to get right to the point, was born late. The doctor had solemnly wiped his spectacles, pursed his lips, made the sort of face all doctors are supposed to make after wiping their spectacles and pursing the lips, and announced that George Adams would be born on August 23.

On August 22 his mother felt pains and retired to await George's arrival. On August 29 the doctor suggested light house work and a change of diet, re-examined his calculations, and stated with assured finality that George would be born within two days. George was born seven days later.

Till the day he died George loved to tell the story of his long-

delayed arrival, and I suppose psychologists might suggest that his lifelong addiction to tardiness was a subconscious means of recapturing the glory, such as it was, that was his on the occasion of his birth.

They say that the worst thief in the world is an honest man ninety-nine per cent of the time. They say that except on certain days of the week Hitler wasn't an altogether unlikable sort of chap. They say that all beautiful women have their unattractive moments, that saints sometimes sin, and that the New York Yankees don't always defeat their opponents from Philadelphia.

They say that nobody runs en-

From *FOURTEEN FOR TONIGHT* by Steve Allen.  
Copyright 1955 by Steve Allen. Reprinted by permission of  
Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc.

## THE LATE MR. ADAMS

tirely true to type. But they are wrong. George Adams was late coming into this world, he was late being weaned, he was late learning to speak, he was late for school habitually from the first day he attended kindergarten, and with very rare exceptions he was late for every blessed appointment of any importance that was ever included in his busy schedule.

His other vices, fortunately, were few and of relative unimportance and his virtues were many. He always managed somehow to discharge his educational responsibilities with ease, and when he graduated from the state university he was in the upper tenth of his class.

He was, needless to say, tardy in arriving at the graduation ceremony, but his dean was in no way surprised by this circumstance, and George's diploma was handed to him privately after the speech-making and singing had ended and the janitors were beginning to fold up the auditorium chairs and put them away.

George's father soon thereafter made an opening at his plant and George filled it neatly. His father, with great wisdom, instructed George's secretary to deliberately lie to George regarding the times of all especially important business

appointments, so that when George had to meet a business associate for lunch at one o'clock he usually was given the impression that the engagement was set for twelve-thirty, and so when he sauntered onto the scene at something like twelve fifty-four there was really no harm done.

George made a great many friends as a junior executive and in no time was promoted and given a substantial increase in income. While not handsome he was more than slightly attractive, women found him amusing, and so one day when he announced that he was engaged to be married the news was not entirely unexpected.

His father, fortunately, had the presence of mind to warn George's bride that her husband-to-be might arrive a few minutes late for the wedding services, so although she was visibly annoyed by this eventuality when it came to pass, she was not driven to tears and there was really no scene at all. Besides, George had the host of excuses: he had stopped to have his car washed and to make a long-distance telephone call to a hotel in New York to make absolutely certain the honeymoon suite had been reserved.

George usually had a good excuse, as a matter of fact. He wasn't

late on purpose; his intentions were the best in the world. It was just that most of the time, what with one thing and another coming up at the last minute, he never quite seemed to get anywhere as early as he wanted to.

In later years George came to be a prominent citizen of the town, and there was even talk one year of running him for mayor. He declined this honor, however, and continued to devote himself to private endeavor. After his father died he assumed the presidency of the plant and rendered the company distinguished service. His marriage withal was a happy one and his children, four in number, were a fine-looking group at the funeral not long ago.

Everyone said it was one of the nicest funerals in recent years, and though George's family was heart-broken, you could see they were still able to feel a glow of pride as they looked over the crowd that packed into the church to pay its respects and hear the funeral oration.

I suppose there must have been many in the crowd who were aware that, in dying, George Adams was early for almost the first time in his life. His physician, who had detected a serious heart

condition, had given him two years to live, at the outside; and the good doctor was as shocked as the townspeople when, three weeks after his examination, diagnosis, and prediction, his patient quietly passed away in his sleep.

The caravan of sleek, black limousines winding to the cemetery was imposing, indeed, and the casual passersby must have concluded that a very important personage was being laid to rest.

One minor mishap interrupted the smooth flow of events, incidentally, at what was, to all practical purposes, the very last minute. The hearse that carried George's coffin must have run over a nail in the road, for one of its tires went suddenly quite flat and the driver and his assistant pulled over to the roadside to replace it with a spare. After a hasty conference it was decided that all the other cars should proceed, as planned, directly to the burial ground. This they did and the mourners, stepping out of the limousines sedately, clustered around the Adams plot and stood conversing in whispers, waiting for George.

He arrived only twenty-three minutes late.

Dennis Etchison is a young college student who has sold stories to *ESCAPADE*, *SEVENTEEN*, *FANTASY & SCIENCE FICTION*, and *NEW WRITINGS IN SF* (vols. 2 & 4). He deplores the self-indulgent chit-chat that sometimes goes on in introductory blurbs, most particularly when the writer is young or new, and would like us to say something nice about singer Ruth Price.

## WET SEASON

*Dennis Etchison*

Madden watched the black crowd on the other side of the moving gelatin wall, as rainwater poured down in translucent sheets over the windshield. He did not listen to the patternless tattoo. Instead he followed with his eyes the group of black shadows floating past the car.

"I . . . I shouldn't have made you come, Lorie," he said at last to the black figure next to him.

She turned from the window, her lidded eyes not disapproving. "That's enough, Jim. I wouldn't have felt right, otherwise."

Madden pressed his chin to his chest, squeezing his eyelids shut. He cleared his throat and rubbed his eyes, and his fingers came away moist.

Again his wife spoke, very quietly. "You . . . were very close to

her, I suppose. James, I only wish there were something . . . Forgive me if I'm crude. But I only wish I could have gotten to know her better. That she might have become, in time, my little girl as well."

He pressed her cool hand.

"It was — just — all the mud around her —" He hit his lips and started the engine and roared up the cemetery road, spinning out and spattering mud as he went.

\* \* \*

The Nash geared to a slippery halt under the wet sycamores.

Bart stood at the end of the cracked driveway, behind the main house, propping open the sagging screen door to his apartment.



Through mist Madden saw the controlled, mildly pleasant line shaping his mouth, leaving the face somber in a new and ill-fitting mask.

"Forget about the rug," said Bart. "It's filthy anyway."

"We're so sorry to do this to you, Bart." Madden's wife brushed water from her clothing. "But we thought the twins were really too young to, well, exactly have their faces rubbed in."

Bart smoothed a hand over his protruding, black-T-shirted belly. "The kids are in the bedroom. Rain must have got 'em drowsy. Left them staring out the window, counting drops or something," he added gently to Madden, testing a smile.

"Let me see to them." Madden's wife started across the room.

The men waited until she was gone.

Bart faced him. "Come over here and have a drink."

"No."

"Really, boy, really now. You know how I mean it. Come on."

At once Madden felt his joints chilled and tired. "No, Bart. I . . . I don't need it." He lowered himself to the sofa that was bulging and splitting like a fat man's incisions.

Bart watched the misty screen door and compared it to the pale Scotch and water in his hand. Twice he shaped his lips to still-born beginnings. He shook his head and said nothing.

"You look at the hole, and the mud," Madden began finally in a low voice, "and you think of . . . that human being there in a box, being lowered into the ground, and you wonder how it can be that — that a part of your body, a piece that has come from you like an arm or leg, can be cut off, killed and buried away, and you never being able to feel with it again.

"But you know, I worked with a man once who had lost an arm in the Korean War; and he said he could close his eyes anytime and suddenly it was there again, the nerves were restored and he could feel down into his fingertips. But when he opened his eyes to see why he hadn't touched what he was reaching for, his eyes told him there was nothing there anymore."

Rain began to tap erratically on a metal vent somewhere in the roof.

"And you know, I can still see the world through my little girl's eyes, feel it as she felt it, even

## WET SEASON

... even though she's been cut off me, like one of my sense organs. I still feel her, feel *through* her, and my nerves, my ganglion just won't listen to the goddam facts."

Outside, water continued to fall and fall illogically, relentlessly, in what seemed to be the result of a vast macro-cosmic defrosting.

Giggling, the twins came out of the bedroom.

Madden saw them and smiled wanly from the sofa. The two little boys acknowledged him peripherally and grinned, grasping their mother's hands more securely.

"How did it go, boys?" inquired Madden, generating concern, and immediately hated his own detachment. *You are my sons, now*, he thought, *my only sons, and I should hold you tight against me —*

"We had fun, Dada. We had samiches."

"An' we tooka nap an' went out an' played an' —"

Why, noted Madden wearily, *they're actually speaking directly to me . . . she almost never lets them do that — what is this, some kind of show for Bart?*

"Out? But it didn't let up today did it, Bart?" he said.

"Well, uh," the dark man gestured firmly to Madden, "they —" and he dropped his voice, ready

to spell out words before the children, "they begged to go out. You brought them in their rain-coats and you know, it was one of those things. For a few minutes is all. Made 'em real happy. God knows I have no practice in child-rearing. Jesus, Jim, I hope they didn't catch anything."

"Tad and Ray never catch colds," stated Madden's wife, smiling her wide, smooth, peculiar kind of smile. "You did fine, Bart."

Madden watched his wife. Svelte in the gray light, she snaked an arm around each of her children's shoulders.

"We'd better go," she said. "It's Sunday and I have a Women's Guild meeting tonight."

"Thanks, Bart. I mean it more than I can say."

They walked together, heads down, to the door. A Sunday comics section for her hair and Lorelei and the giggly children clamored down the shiny, fragmented driveway.

Bart gripped his arm, looking deep in his eyes and nodding.

"You know I know. I can't say it. But I remember the Sunday we hurried Mama." Hearing it said now, Madden felt no longer a memory of pain but a bond with manhood. "Just so's you know I know." And a slap caught Mad-

den between the shoulder blades and sent him into the rain.

To a car where a somehow strange woman and children waited.

\* \* \*

He switched off the ignition and sat very still, staring into the liquid pattern on the windshield.

"Ready, children?" asked Mrs. Madden, not looking to the back seat, taking her purse into her lap.

From the back seat came giggling.

Madden lay his head back to let his eyes trace the headliner of the car. Half a minute earlier, shutting off the wipers, he had caught himself hypnotized as the twin arcs of the wiper blades melted away. Now, motor silenced, he listened to the sound of endless beads beating their pattern into the top of the automobile.

In the back seat, there was whispering like the swishing of cars down an empty street.

"Let's go, children," prompted their mother. "There'll be plenty of time for secrets when we get in the house."

Abruptly Madden snapped to. He focused his eyes from the windshield to the woman next to

him, attuned his ears from the drumming overhead to the whisper of cloth on plastic as the children slid across the back seat. He touched the handle of his wife's door; it was cold. Almost as cold as his hand.

Behind him, someone giggled.

\* \* \*

Outside the picture window, premature dusk settled along the block like silent black wings.

"Won't . . . won't you eat something?" asked Mrs. Madden tentuously. She leaned into the living-room, spoon in hand and spoke in silhouette from the yellow kitchen doorway.

He cleared his throat. "What?" Madden's five fingertips moved involuntarily to the pane. The glass was cold.

"Well," she intoned maternally, "you should have something. It's almost dark. Let me turn on the —"

"It's all right, Lorelei." *For God's sake, he thought, don't patronize me. Not now.*

Chilled and fatigued to the marrow, he sat in the newly rearranged and alien livingroom and tried to release his senses from the pain of here-and-now. He shut his eyes and tried to let

## WET SEASON

his thoughts blow with the storm on down the blurred panorama of empty street.

She pattered for a time in the kitchen and Madden, curiously detached in the dark and the over-stuffed chair, noticed again her effortless, liquid movements. The way she had of gliding over a floor as though it were polished glass, her legs flowing out and back with each step in a charming suggestion of no gristle or bone. No deliberate, angular bend to Lorie's arm, no; in her, stirring and pouring out and rinsing away became a Siamese rubber-arm ballet.

"Your soup is in the oven, keeping warm. And the twins are tucked in, so don't — I mean, they shouldn't give you any trouble."

Mrs. Madden paused in silhouette, then glided behind the enormous sagging hand that enclosed her husband.

"Lorie," he swallowed. Away in the bright kitchen, an electric clock hummed.

She sat on the armrest.

"Lorelei, do you ever . . . think about the decision you made ten months ago?" He tried to stop his teeth from chattering. "I mean —"

Her arms reached a pale circle around his shoulders. "You are the finest father my boys could

possibly have. And I . . ." And she smoothed his hair with her oddly flat hands and did not finish.

"Do you need to talk, Jim. The Guild meeting —"

Yes, he thought, pressing his eyes tightly shut until shards of gray light fired inside his eyelids, *yes, I need something, I hear your words but they are only words, I need more than talk, I need you warm against me, I need to live —*

He drew her into his lap. And at once it struck him.

She was not warm. Her skin was cold, cold almost as —

He pushed her away.

"Jim, I'm sorry. Is there something I can do for you?"

"No." He stared ahead into the night-filled room. "They're waiting for you already. There isn't anything you can do for me."

Picking up coat, purse and overshoes, Mrs. Madden pulled back the front door to a sheet of rain. A reminder about the soup, and she entered the falling sea.

The telephone refused to warm in his hands.

A sputter and crackle of rain and whispers on the wires between and across town, a mile away, a phone purred to life.

And purred. And purred.

"Yeah?"

"Hello, Bart. What am I interrupting?"

"Jimmy? That you, boy?"

"I hope I'm not interrupting anything."

"No, no. Listen. Lorie gone to her meeting?"

"That's right."

"Then you're alone." Pause.

"Everything all right over there?"

"Yes. Aw look, I shouldn't have called."

"You wanna talk, Jim?"

"I guess. No . . . Look, Bart, is someone coming over tonight? You going out?"

"In this weather? Look, is everything all right?"

Pause. "Uh, Bart, I wonder . . . I just wondered if . . . aw, never mind I shouldn't have bothered you"

"Look. You wanna come over here? We could talk, if you want."

"Can't leave the kids."

"They're asleep, then, and you're alone over there. Look, you want me to come over? Talk or something till Lorie gets back?"

Pause. "I have no business bothering you."

"Crap. Look, I'll come over, okay? We can talk, you know, like we used to."

"I'm pretty bad company tonight, I'm afraid. And the weather. Sure you want to?"

"My idea, isn't it? And look, how can you turn down a lonely ol' bachelor like me? See you in ten minutes."

"Thanks very much, Bart," but he had hung up.

\* \* \*

Madden waited on the back porch, listening.

Far down in the darkness, the throaty thrumming of the frogs met with the rushing of running water.

All about his thin figure, dirty streams dripped from the roof to mingle with puddles at his cold feet, to slip on down over the slanting yard, to join larger tributaries that splashed their way through the thorny shrubbery of the ravine to feed at last with violent churning into the shrouded riverbed far below.

From in front, Madden heard wet brakes grip to a splashing stop. Shivering, he turned inside.

The two men sat across from one another in the living room, two men who knew each other best of all in the world. There was only a pale-moth glow from the kitchen. They spoke, and they did not speak, and from time to time Bart laughed and sipped

## WET SEASON

from the brandy snifter in his lap.

". . . but then they threw the next game to the motherin' Angels," Bart was saying.

"Yes," said Madden.

Bart rose and ambled to the black picture window.

Abruptly Madden was aware that his brother had stopped talking.

Madden stared with him. He saw his brother frown. *Do you feel it too?* he thought. Vaguely illumined beneath the street lamp was Bart's car, leaned against the curb, weathering the storm. Idly, Madden had a vision of the rain pouring off the metal top, streaming down the rolled-up windows and down into the innards of the door, where the handle and lock mechanism were.

"Jimbo. God damn it."

Madden watched him. "What's wrong?"

Bart drained his glass. "I don't wanna say it. I don't even know I'm right. Or if I oughta say it."

"It's all right — I can talk about Dada. Probably it would do me good." He massaged his face, trying to relax. I know I have to face —

"No. That's not what I'm talking about." Bart pivoted from the window and the rain. "Listen to me, kid. *Do you feel it?*"

"Feel what?"

"Something, about this house, this town. I don't know how to say it. But can't you feel it?" Bart glared into the empty brandy glass.

"Something like what?" Madden lounged back into the cushion, ready to listen. *Now, thought Madden, this is the way. It won't prove a thing unless he says it first.*

"Damn," breathed Bart. He turned back to the night and lit a cigaret. "Maybe I'm going off the deep end. Look. Can I ask you a question?"

"Shoot."

"Something about this house. I don't know. The way it smells now, the way the chairs creak when I sit down, the color of the light, for God's sake, like the room is underwater or something. And all since she moved in." The cigarette reflection burned in the window. "Naw. Man, you're the one needs to talk at a time like this. I'm supposed to cheer you."

"So you're cheerin'. Shoot."

"Look, it's just that — haven't you noticed anything, well, different about the place since Lorie and her kids moved in? That it isn't really yours anymore? I mean, it's like every person has a rhythm, a pattern to his everyday life. You

go into a man's bedroom, it *smells* like him, the bed bends a certain way when you sit on it, because it's been shaped to fit every angle and bulge just right over the years. And you go into the kitchen, the way the dishes are piled up in the sink tell you more about the guy than a look at his diary, if you know what I mean. It's like the house soaks up what you are, the way you feel about life, and everything in the house gets to feeling the same way, too. And not only the place, but the woman he marries: she seems to fit right in, fit him, and the house . . . And that's part of it, too, Jimbo. She's — and I know I'm step-pin' way over the bounds on this, but dammit, man, she's *not* you, you know? Let me ask: don't you notice anything unusual about Lorie?"

Madden shut his eyes impatiently. "She's an unusually attractive woman, if that's what you mean."

"No. But then I promised myself not to bring up any of this with you, at least not for a long time . . .

"But it isn't just this house. Hell, we both grew up in Greenworth, I knew every turn in the river like the lines on my hand years before the government moved in.

And it's changed now, somehow. First, it was just the way the trees started growing crooked along the banks, but lately the whole town seems, I don't know, *funny*. The way the air smells, the paint on the houses . . . I don't know. I just don't know. But I'll tell you this: if I was blind-folded and left here, I'd never in a year guess this was the same town we grew up in."

Outside, the moon slipped for a moment through a pocket in the clouds, washing Bart's face fish-like-pale by the window.

"Bart. What is it?"

"I wish I could be sure, kid. Maybe you should forget it. I pray to God I could. Jim, do you know how many storms like this we've had in Greenworth in the last twenty-five years?"

Madden stirred.

"I'll tell you: three, before two years ago. And not one raised the river more than a few inches. But in two years, five big ones. Here." Bart spilled his coat pocket onto the coffee table. "What the hell — I spent yesterday in the library looking things up, I don't know what for. Something made me do it. But God, I've gotta show you."

Madden reached to the lamp.

Little white slips of paper fluttered in Bart's hands. For the first

## WET SEASON

time in his life Madden saw his brother trembling.

"God!" he laughed nervously. "Help me, will you, Jim? Here are the pieces to a crazy jigsaw, it doesn't make any sense, but something in the back of my head keeps me from getting any sleep lately. Here, look, read it all and then tell me I'm nuts and send me home, but *do something!*"

"Deaths by drowning, County Beach: this year and last, total 31. Previous two years' total, 9. What's this for?"

"Don't stop now." Bart fumbled at the liquor cabinet.

"Total rainfall in inches, adjacent counties last year, up 300%."

"See! It's spreading."

Another slip of paper. "New residents in Greenworth, past 24 months: Broadbent, Mr. and Mrs. C. L.; Marber, G.; Nottingham, Mr. and Mrs. Frank R.; . . ."

Madden leaned intently forward.

"There's two dozen more."

He scrutinized his brother's now twisted face. "So?"

"So? So you're right, they've nothing separately, but put them all together — Let me ask you: Lorie never told you where she moved from when she came here, did she?"

"Now that you bring it up, no. But what —?"

"Listen to this. Last night I got out the phone book and dialed these new listings. Twenty-one are married couples. And every woman —" Bart emptied his glass. ". . . Every woman is in the Women's Guild."

Ice water poured into Madden's stomach. "So?"

Bart jerked forth a folded clipping. "This was in the Gazette when one finally moved in twenty months ago."

Maddened fingered the newspaper photo of Mr. and Mrs. Peter Hallendorf, newly established real estate broker and his lovely bride.

"Use this." A pocket magnifier hit the coffee table.

She was lovely. There in the enlarged dots was a face that was — "I don't see —"

Bart's shaking finger jabbed at the indistinct eyes, the mouth.

At first he didn't see it. Just that her eyes were softly, lethargically lidded.

Bart snatched a framed photograph from the bookcase and tossed it to his lap.

And there.

There were the two sets of lidded eyes, two wide, smooth, peculiar smiles, side by side. They might have been sisters.

Madden groped. At the bottom of his consciousness, the pressure



was rising now and he felt his finger giving way in the dike.

"Jim," granted Bart. "I called the Community Center this evening. They never heard of it. *There is no Women's Guild!*

"And now. Just one more question. I hate to remind you, boy, but you've got to have all the pieces in front of you." Bart leaned over him, breath coming fast and pungent. "Tell me again how it was your little girl died."

Madden bit his knuckle. "Man, I don't know what you're driving at. Please —"

"Just say it!"

"She . . . she, you know. She drowned — in the — bottom of the tub." He fought up out of the chair.

Both men faced each other, white-faced.

"Goddam," breathed Bart, turning back to the darkness. "Goddam me for saying it."

\* \* \*

Walking in the wet, Madden knew at last that he could leave the house behind and give himself up to the storm. Slimy, tangled brush grabbed at his soppy clothes, but he did not think of it and slid down the ravine to the churning riverbed. In the glis-

tening night he saw the swelling rush muddying over collapsing banks, and he remembered the first and worst storm, two seasons ago; how the ravine filled steadily to the brim, spilling up over the backyard; and then, weeks later, how the yard blossomed alive with all manner of new, unnamed wild plants and shoots and bloomfaced flowers. And how he suddenly awoke one night to discover the moldering ravine an amphitheater of swollen hordes of singing insect life, a thundering of bullfrogs, a sweltering din of mosquitoes, a screeching chorus of crickets. Latent with life, pollen and cyst and egg had been carried by the water and given birth at long last.

Madden stretched through the wet growth to the river's edge. Facts and meanings swirled and eddied within him.

He saw the fresh water flowing on past, beaded for the sea.

*A paper boat or a leaf could float the five miles to the turbines, and beyond to the sea. But only something living could do the opposite.*

Suddenly, as if by a signal, frog and insect ceased their noise.

In the new silence, above the rain, Madden heard a car door slam.

## WET SEASON

He began tearing savagely at the shrubbery. His hair and chin dripped and his clothes were torn and caked with mud below the waist, but he did not think of these things as he climbed his way to the porch.

He smeared a wet trail across the kitchen.

Lorelei came through the unlighted livingroom.

"Why James, I thought you'd be in bed. And your clothes, why —"

"Wh-where have you been?" he shivered.

She reached to touch his clothes. He jumped back.

He saw that her clothing, too, was dripping. Much more than from a run from the car.

"Why James —"

"Get away! Who are you?"

The sound of giggling.

He ran to the bathroom door. He kicked it in.

Griming in the stark white porcelain bathtub were the twins, Tad and Ray. They splashed and curled eel-like appendages up over the edge.

"What is this?" muttered Madden, blinded by the light. "What

are you boys hatching for at . . ." Then he saw their smooth, shining skins glistening in the water in a strange, new way.

*So this is the way Darla came upon them that day, he thought. So that was why, that was why. So now I have no choice . . .*

He fell upon them, pushing their small heads under the water until hubbles floated up.

They came up grinning.

"So you know," she said.

He turned.

The bright, white tiles around him.

Lorelei, dripping, came toward him, holding out her arms as if to embrace him. An alien scaliness glittered anew along her neck, her boneless arms.

Behind him, the little ones giggled.

Madden stepped back before she could touch him. His legs met the tub and he tumbled backwards, seeing in a flash the bright walls and ceiling.

There was a resounding splash and then violent churning. And giggling.

And the sound of the rain outside.



*These great minds were Rosicrucians . . .*



*Benjamin Franklin*



*Isaac Newton*



*Francis Bacon*

## WHAT SECRET POWER DID THEY POSSESS?

*Why were these men great?*

How does anyone — man or woman — achieve greatness? Is it not by mastery of the powers within ourselves?

Know the mysterious world within you! Attune yourself to the wisdom of the ages! Grasp the inner power of your mind! Learn the secrets of a full and peaceful life!

Benjamin Franklin, statesman and inventor . . . Isaac Newton, discoverer of the Law of Gravitation . . . Francis Bacon, philosopher and scientist . . . like many other learned and great men and women . . . were Rosicrucians. The Rosicrucians (NOT a religious organization) have been in existence for centuries. Today, headquarters of the Rosicrucians send over seven million pieces of mail annually to all parts of the world.

### *The* ROSICRUCIANS

San Jose (AMORC) California 95114, U.S.A.

#### THIS BOOK FREE!



Write for your **FREE** copy of "The Mastery of Life" — **TODAY**. No obligation. A non-profit organization. Address: Scribe Y.H.Q.

Scribe **Y.H.Q.**  
The ROSICRUCIANS  
(AMORC)  
San Jose, California 95114, U.S.A.

Please send me the free book, *The Mastery of Life*, which explains how I may learn to use my faculties and powers of mind.

Name

Address

City

State

#### SEND THIS COUPON

PLEASE INCLUDE  
YOUR ZIP CODE